DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 308 273 UD 026 856

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TITLE	Getting a Lot Further...Some Factors Influencing Decisions which Ethnic Families Make about Children's Schooling and Post-School Futures.
INSTITUTION	Australian Inst. of Family Studies, Melbourne.
SPONS AGENCY	Australian Ministerial Advisory Committee on Multicultural and Migrant Education.
REPORT NO	ISBN-0-7241-6820-6
PUB DATE	87
NOTE	115p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Australian Institute of Family Studies, 300 Queen Street, Melbourne 3000, Victoria, Australia.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Career Choice; *Career Planning; Decision Making; Ethnic Groups; Expectation; *Family Role; Females; Foreign Countries; *Immigrants; Interviews; *Non English Speaking; Parent Attitudes; *Parent Influence; Parent School Relationship; Secondary Education
IDENTIFIERS	*Australia

ABSTRACT

Families from non-English speaking backgrounds who migrated to Australia were surveyed on their opinions about Australian schools and the process of making decisions about schooling and careers for young people. Four types of factors were organized into a framework for conducting the study and analyzing the data: (1) student background factors such as ethnicity, gender, and length of time in Australia; (2) home environment and home influence factors such as parents' aspirations and expectations; (3) school environment factors such as students' attitudes and experiences; and (4) home-school interface factors such as quality and quantity of home-school contact. Parents' opinions were solicited through semi-structured discussions in the parents' native languages. Other information was generated from open-ended interviews with teachers, community leaders, and social workers who had particular knowledge of the families. Qualitative results are presented for the following groups: (1) Vietnamese families; (2) Greek families; (3) Chinese families; (4) Turkish families; and (5) English-speaking families. In general, parents had high aspirations for their children's future but were concerned that schools were not organized to help their children go further. Photographs and a 28-item bibliography are included. (VM)

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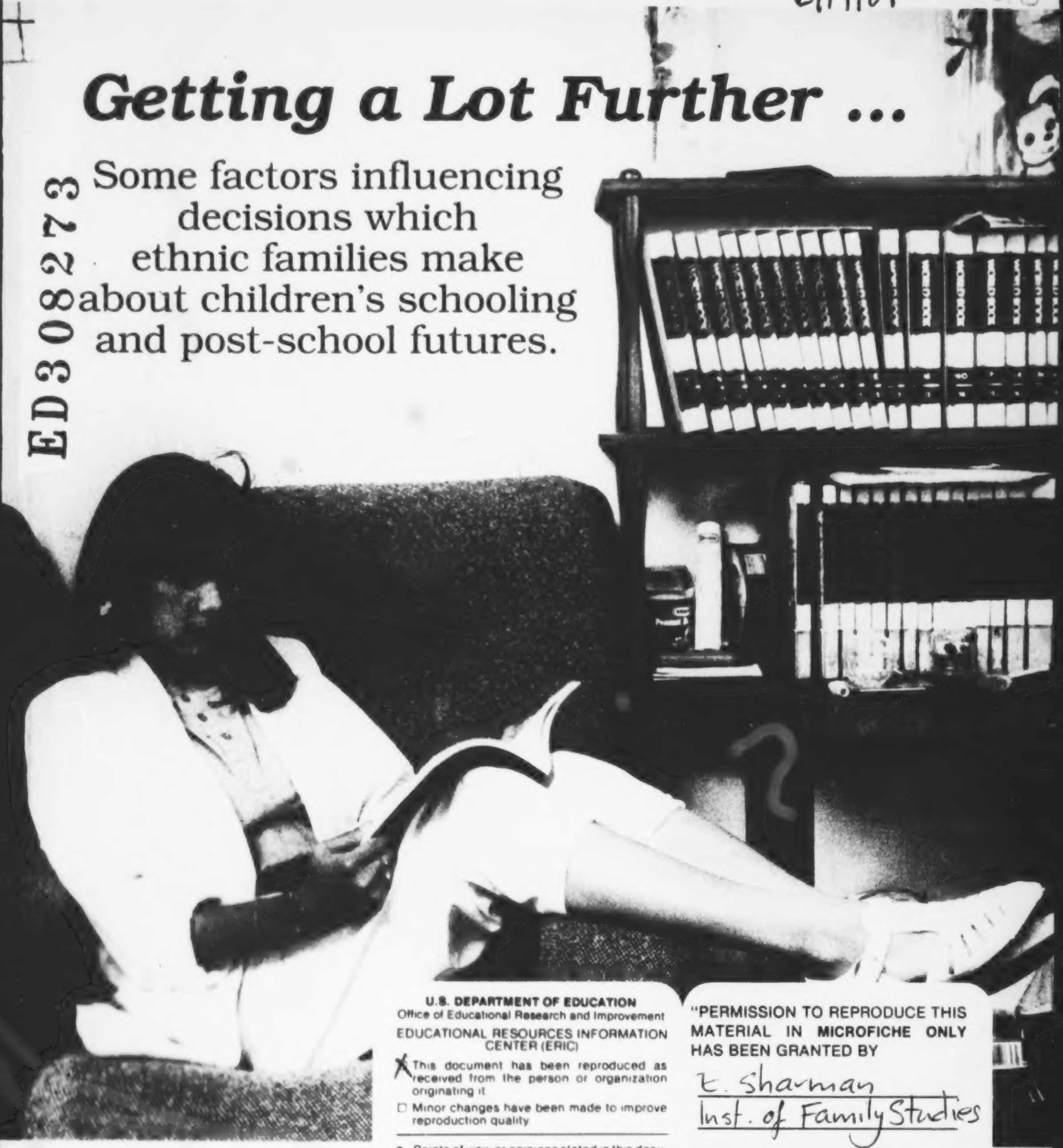

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by Robyn Hartley with Frank Maas

Australian Institute of Family Studies

A report prepared for the
Ministerial Advisory Committee on Multicultural and Migrant Education
1987

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National Library of Australia Cataloguing in Publication entry

Hartley, Robyn.
Getting a lot Further-.

ISBN 0 7241 6820 6.

1. Children of immigrants - Education - Australia. 2. Minority students - Australia - Family relationships. 3. Minority Youth - Australia - Family relationships. I. Maas, Frank. II. Victoria. Ministerial Advisory Committee on Multicultural and Migrant Education. IV. Australian Institute of Family Studies. V. Title.

370.19'342

ASCIS Cataloguing in Publication Entry (prepared by SCIS)

Hartley, Robyn.
Getting a lot Further-: some factors influencing decisions which ethnic families make about children's schooling and post-school futures.

ISBN 0-7241-6820-6.

1. ETHNIC GROUPS - CHILDREN - EDUCATION. 2. MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION. I. Maas, Frank. II. Victoria. Ministerial Advisory Committee on Multicultural and Migrant Education. III. Australian Institute of Family Studies. IV. Title.

370.19 42 DDC 19
370.19 ADDC 11

Foreword

What is an 'effective' school?

This report began as a study of how ethnic families make decisions about their children's post-school careers. It has, however, much broader implications for how schools interact with their communities.

I want here to point to some of those broader implications and to ask the question: Are the disparities revealed by this study, between ethnic parent expectations of the education system and what happens to their children in the schools, merely an example of 'culture clash'? Or are they indicators of a wider concern with how well many schools assist parents in the task of preparing children for life?

The findings of our research do not suggest that schools are failing or that teachers not trying to help children achieve. Though dissatisfaction and criticism is expressed, there are also indications that parents who migrated to Australia with minimal educational achievement themselves do appreciate that our schools may be the pathway to a better life, to wider options for their children. So the criticisms should be read more thoughtfully than as the views of parents from a different cultural background who do not understand 'modern educational philosophy'.

For what all parents want for their children is the best possible education, the development of skills, attitudes, competencies and work habits that will help them towards 'success' in adult life. Definitions of success will obviously vary, but knowing how to cope, having a job, being an efficient, capable adult, figure large in all of them. What really matters, in any event, is how well, how effectively, schools structure the learning process to achieve such goals.

We do know something quite systematic about the meaning of 'effective' in the context of schools. And it could be asked whether the common sense views of the parents in this study may not be closer to notions of what is 'effective' than much of the currently accepted 'wisdom' of educational theory and practice.

I refer (only briefly here) to the vast array of research on the 'effective schools movement'. In the USA and in the UK, since the days of the Coleman-Jencks reports on educational inequality, there have been dissenters who refused to believe that schools 'do not make any difference'. Disadvantage, it was claimed by those reports, stems from family background, from the deprivations of low socio-economic status. Pouring all the extra funds that could be found into better school buildings, science laboratories, libraries or equipment seemed to make no difference. Schools in disadvantaged neighbourhoods (it was said) could not overcome the negative effects of coming from poor, low status family backgrounds. This was, of course, both a let-out for teachers and a counsel of despair. If nothing could be done, why bother trying?

Yet questions remained. Some schools in some ghetto areas **did** make a difference. Their students did achieve, they did go on to better things. Why? The answer lay in research which tried to find out what qualities distinguished 'effective schools' from the norm and what characterized the truly 'ineffective' schools from all the others.

Here, I summarize those characteristics of 'effective schools' in a way that fails to do justice to the careful and complex research involved, but I do so to alert readers to what I think is the real message being conveyed to schools by the parents quoted in the present report.

Effective schools were those in which there was a strong and active teacher focus on the task, more direct instruction and more interaction between teacher and pupil. The school principal was a true instructional leader, visiting and observing classroom teaching, close to the children, with a 'bias for action', not defining the leadership role in a limited, passive, bureaucratic manner. They were true 'cultural managers', concerned to encourage the achievement of personal goals but with the focus on achievement.

The staff members of these schools understood that curriculum change could not come before chaos was turned into order, so that the school environment permitted plenty of time for learning and for students to 'work hard'. They did not focus only on technical improvements in test scores, but fostered a 'humanistic' set of processes aimed at a love of learning and a vision of successful achievement for every student.

Teachers and aides were chosen with great care, taking more notice of 'spark' or 'energy' than of seniority or higher degrees. Their professional development was encouraged, less in terms of educational principles than through learning how to use new curriculum materials. A more standardized curriculum and series of texts ensured that each successive year built on what had already been learned.

A uniform homework policy and a minimum daily homework expectation was developed and special programs were coordinated with the regular school program. The overriding 'philosophy' was based less on research and theory than on the common sense notion that hard work leads to success.

The 'effective schools' research shows that change takes several years and that an effort to change cannot succeed overnight. But it does show that schools do make a difference and it shows how.

This report speaks very clearly for itself about the linguistic and cultural difficulties of ethnic group parents in understanding what Australian schools are about. My point is simply that it might also make **all** of us ask what they are about.

As Director of the Australian Institute of Family Studies I am grateful to MACMME for funding this small but important study, for it has taught us much about family values and family processes in relation to education. The study was designed by Frank Maas, Paul Amato, Gay Ochiltree, Peter McDonald and myself, with significant input from the external Steering Committee members, Joy Elley, (MACMME), Lance Vertigan (Collingwood Education Centre), Ken Polk and Doreen Rosenthal (University of Melbourne).

The main tasks of organizing, conducting, analysing and writing up the group interview findings were carried out by Robyn Hartley and we are very pleased with the result.

I trust the report will be read widely and help improve understanding of how schools do and can help parents and children from different cultural backgrounds achieve their goals in life. Education is a key partner in supporting parents in their child-rearing tasks. If we choose to invest in our nation's future, we had best do it as effectively as our wits will allow.

Don Edgar,
Director.

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7

Acknowledgements

In 1986 the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Multicultural and Migrant Education (MACMME) commissioned the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) to conduct a study of migrant youth transition from school to after school, with an emphasis on the role of family decision making. The general outline and methodology of the study was conceived by Dr Joy Elley, then research officer for MACMME. AIFS staff members, Dr Paul Amato, Frank Maas and Dr Gay Ochiltree, together with the Director, Dr Don Edgar and Deputy Director, Research, Dr Peter McDonald then produced a more detailed framework for the study. Robyn Hartley joined the project in March 1987. She was responsible for modifications to the original design, the organisation of field work, analysis of data and writing up of the report.

Within the AIFS, members of the group mentioned above (with the exception of Dr Amato who left for America before the field work began) monitored the study and provided comments and suggestions throughout. Frank Maas supervised the study, commented critically on drafts of the report, and in particular, contributed to the structure and ideas contained in the final section.

Members of the external Steering Committee for the study were:

Ms Joy Elley	MACMME
Mr Lance Vertigan	Collingwood Education Centre
Dr Ken Polk,	Criminology Department, Melbourne University
Dr Doreen Rosenthal	Psychology Department, Melbourne University

Their expertise in particular areas and their critical comments at various stages of the study are greatly appreciated.

The study is based on the views of parents and young people predominantly from non-English speaking backgrounds. The Institute is exceedingly grateful to the many parents who gave up their time to come to discussions on winter nights, during the day, or at the weekend. It is hoped that this report will assist a wider understanding of their aspirations for their children's futures and their concerns about their children's education.

The views and efforts of many other individuals contributed to the final report. They included ethnic teacher aides, ethnic teachers, community centre workers and other community members who variously commented on the issues of the study, helped to contact parents, and assisted in organising meetings. The administration and staff members of the schools who were involved in the study were unfailingly helpful and cooperative.

Finally, the study would not have been possible without the assistance of Ms Sultan Dogan, Ms Magdalene Passilidis, Dr Thu-Hang Nguyen and Hongvann Thai, who conducted the parent discussion groups ably and with understanding.

Further copies of this report are available from the Australian Institute of Family Studies, 300 Queen Street, Melbourne 3000 Victoria. Telephone: (03) 608 6888.

Table of Contents

Foreword iii

Acknowledgements vi

Introduction 1
- The Context 1
- Family Decision Making: A Framework 2

1. The Study 3
- Aims 3
- Method 3
- The Discussion Groups 4
  - NESB groups 4
  - Parents, students and ex-students 4
  - English Speaking Background Groups 5
- Using a Discussion Group Approach 5
  - Some cautions 6
  - The discussion framework 7
  - Organising the groups 7
- Discussions With Individuals 8
- Organisation of the Report 8

2. Vietnamese Families 10
- The Participants 10
- Aspirations and Values Concerning Education 10
- Gender 12
- When Expectations Break Down 13
- Setting Realistic Goals 14
- A 'Very Different System' 15
  - Schooling in Vietnam 16
- Coping With the Differences 17
  - Discipline 17
  - Private and public schools 18
- Home and School Interaction 19
  - Understanding 19
  - Parent participation 20
  - Student reports 21
- Restricted Options? 22
- Availability of Information 22
- Making Decisions 24
- Summary 26

3. Greek Families 27
- The Participants 27
- Aspirations and Values Concerning Education 28
- Gender 29
- Sorting Out What is Possible 30
- Parents' Influence 32
- Home and School Interaction 33

The world outside the home 33
Discipline 34
Homework 35
Individualism 35
School Understanding of Greek Families 35
Preparation for the Future 36
Sources of Information 38
The school 38
Friends and relatives 39
Family resources 40
Range of Occupations 40
Summary 41

4. Chinese Families 43
The Participants 43
Aspirations and Values Concerning Education 43
Gender 45
'But the children's ability is the key element' 45
The Importance of English Language Skills 46
Schools and Preparation for the Future 47
Discipline 48
Homework 48
Peer group pressure 48
Understanding Chinese family needs 49
Making Decisions 49
Summary 51

5. Turkish Families 52
The Participants 52
Aspirations and Values Concerning Education 52
Gender 55
'They could go a lot further if they got support from the school' 57
Lack of discipline 58
The curriculum 60
Lack of encouragement 60
Lack of understanding 61
Discrimination 63
Sources of Information 63
The school: 'There is a long space between home and school' 63
Friends and acquaintances 65
Making Decisions 65
'We are the only people who can tell' 65
Choice of occupations 66
Summary 67

6. English-Speaking Background Families 68
The Participants 68
Aspirations and Values Concerning Education 68
Gender 71

School and Preparation for the Future 72
    Curriculum 72
    Achievement orientation 73
    Career assistance 74
Sources of Information 74
Summary 76

7. Summary 77
Introduction 77
Overview 77
Aspirations and Values: Parents 78
Aspirations and Values: Young People 79
Aspirations for Daughters 80
Attitudes Towards Schools 81
Home/school Interaction 82
Information About Schools and Occupations 82
Decision Making 83

8. Issues and Implications 85
Introduction 85
The Role of Schools 86
Home Influences: 87
    Parental aspirations 87
    Education of daughters 88
    Values concerning education 90
Home/school Interaction 91
    Parent support 92
    Homework 92
    Assessment and reporting 93
    The compulsory and post-compulsory years 95
The Need for Information 95
Sources of Information 97
Conclusion 99

References 101

Introduction

This exploratory study focusses on some of the factors which influence the decisions which families from a Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) make about young people's education and future careers.

Planning for the future, deciding when to leave school and making choices about want to do after schooling, have always been important areas for young people. They are even more relevant at present, given continued high levels of youth unemployment and Commonwealth Government youth and education policies which are aimed at most young people completing a full 12 years of education.

There are many factors which may affect how long adolescents stay on at school and the paths which they take after schooling. Very broadly, there are social and cultural influences, such as family aspirations, community expectations and school structure; economic factors at family, community and national level, and individual abilities and preferences. All of these may operate as resources or constraints for particular individuals. This study is concerned with one aspect of this complex of factors, that of family decision making.

The Context

The position of young people as members of families is important both educationally, and in relation to the 'tasks' of adolescence.

In recent years, there has been a considerable amount of research published concerning the attitudes of NESB Australians to the Australian education system, and the response of Australian schools to their NESB students. Sturman (1985) gives a useful summary of recent research. However, what seems to be missing is qualitative descriptions of how decisions are made about school and career alternatives and in particular, about the part that families play in these decisions.

Underlying initiation of this study was a belief that if schools and other organisations and bodies which are concerned with youth transition have a greater understanding of the role of families in this regard, they can contribute more effectively to the decisions which are made. Recent State and Commonwealth Government policies have encouraged parent and community participation in education. In part this reflects a belief that outcomes for students will be more positive if home and school influences are not in opposition. Some schools have established very effective parent networks. Nevertheless, on a day to day basis, schools still tend to see students as isolated from family rather than as integral members of a family.

We know however, that despite the obvious importance of the peer group in the lives of adolescents, families are still very important. During adolescence, fundamental decisions about occupation, values and friendship choices are made which can affect an individual's future. Research indicates that most adolescents turn to their parents for guidance with major concerns at this time (Coleman, 1980; Edgar, 1980). Therefore, we would expect that parents have some influence in decisions about when adolescents leave school and the directions they take after leaving school. More specifically, '... there is evidence that the expectations of parents have the most powerful influence on school retention' (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1987:112). Further, although adolescence can be a period of conflict and tension between parents and children, young people's values have been shown to be usually not basically in opposition to those of their parents' and it is suggested that the idea of a 'generation gap' has perhaps been over-emphasised (Ochiltree, 1984). This is likely to be so particularly in the case of NESB families with a tradition of strong ties and parental authority. This is not to deny that some NESB parents and children do experience conflict over a range of matters concerned with personal and social behaviour (Rosenthal, 1985).

Family Decision Making: A Framework

Family factors which are potential influences on school and occupational outcomes for NESB young people can be summarised under four broad headings:

- student background factors such as ethnicity, gender, length of time in Australia, parents' education, parents' occupation, reason for immigration (refugee or otherwise);
- home environment and home influence factors such as parents' aspirations for their children, parents' expectations about their children's performance, parents' knowledge of schooling and occupations, the influence of other family members, use of English in the home;
- school environment factors such as students' attitudes towards school, teachers' understanding of student needs, student experiences of discrimination, the availability of advice on careers and further education;
- home-school interface factors such as quality and quantity of home-school contacts, conflict between cultures of home and school, parental interest in school, parental help with school work, importance of school to parents.

Outcomes from these influences are student aspirations and values concerning the future, perceived problems and supports in attaining goals, importance of the views of parents, student knowledge of job possibilities and occupations.

The above framework was used to develop areas of focus for the study and to organise the qualitative data.

1. The Study

Aims

Decisions which are made in families about when young people leave school and what they do after leaving are the outcomes of processes generally occurring over a period of time. This study aimed to gather qualitative information about some of the factors which might influence such decisions infamilies from a non-English speaking background.

Specifically, the study aimed to gather information on the following home environment, home influence and home/school interaction factors:

- aspirations and educational values of parents andchildren;
- parents' and students' attitudes towards school, particularly how school was seen as affecting opportunities for particular groups;
- the nature of school and family interaction and contact;
- knowledge and information about schools, further education and career options which was available to families either through the school or other sources.

There are limitations inherent in the study as in any study and it is important to state them clearly at the outset.

- The study does not assume that ethnicity or non-English speaking background are simple factors that can be used to 'explain' differences, nor does it assume that either is necessarily of overwhelming importance in family decision making. It is assumed that they are two of a number of factors which determine the interaction between an individual young person and the education system, and which influence outcomes for that young person. Issues which relate to a non-English speaking background migrant identity (such as culture, strength of ethnic identity, language skills, resettlement experience and length of residence) interact with more general factors such as class, gender, age and educational background. We did not aim to tease out the effect of all of these factors nor would it have been possible to do so, given the scope of the present study. We did aim to gather the views of a variety of people within a number of different ethnic groups whose experience might reflect the interaction of some of the above factors.
- While the study did include members of a number of different ethnic groups, it did not aim to make direct comparisons between groups on any particular factor.
- The study did not aim to document retention rates or post-school destinations of any particular ethnic group.

Method

The information on which this report is based was gathered in two ways. The first was a series of semi-structured discussions with small groups of NESB parents, secondary school students and young people whohad left school. These discussions were conducted in the language of the group members by bi-lingual interviewers. The second was a series of open ended interviews in English with a variety of people who had some particular knowledge of the issues on which the study focussed. Most of these people were members of the NESB groups included in the study. These interviews were conducted by the project co-ordinator. In addition, the project co-ordinator interviewed a group of English-speaking background (ESB) parents and a group of ESB students from each of two areas, one inner suburban, the other a relatively affluent Eastern suburb. Overall, approximately 220 people (128 parents, 52 students, 21 ex-students and 23 other individuals) participated in group or individual discussions.

The Discussion Groups

The discussion groups were planned to include people with a variety of backgrounds and experiences, rather than individuals who might be representative of a particular ethnic group or sub-group. We took the view that each individual's experience is valid in its own right and can point to issues which are important for others. The relatively short time period available for information gathering for the study (approximately three months) and the difficulty of organising discussions made the gathering of a representative group difficult. There may be a bias towards educational interest on the part of parents. Those who participated were self-selected by the fact that they agreed to spend at least an hour and a half talking with us for no obvious or immediate reward apart from that of airing their opinions.

NESB groups

Given the limitations of the study, it was clear from the outset that individuals from only a small number of different ethnic backgrounds could be included. It was initially decided to focus on four language background groups, Greek, Turkish, ethnic Vietnamese and Vietnamese of Chinese origin. The rationale for this choice related to the length of time each had been established as a migrant group in Australia, Greeks as a long-established group, Turks as a group which had had less time to establish themselves and Vietnamese as a more recently arrived group. As the study proceeded, the Chinese background group was included as a group in its own right and we sought to speak to Chinese people who had come from countries other than Vietnam. This was largely because of the response of those in the initial pilot group who made it clear that they were very pleased to be recognised as a separate group. The positive response which we later received from Chinese people from areas other than Vietnam reinforced this decision.

Parents, students and ex-students

In order to assess differing values, understandings and experiences across generations, we met with groups of parents, high school students and young people who had left school. The emphasis was on parents, and this was reflected in the fact that most groups were parent groups. There are some qualitative studies and some anecdotal or less formally collected information concerning student attitudes and processes in relation to schooling and after-school options. There is much less informationabout parents' input into decision making. We were concerned to explore this aspect. The only criterion for inclusion in the parent group was that individuals were born overseas. The great majority of parents had children at high school; a few had children at primary school only.

The students who were at high school were predominantly from year 10. This level was selected because it is usually the last compulsory year of schooling and it was thought that students at this age would be beginning to think critically about future plans, even if for some it was not a burning issue. We found in fact that future plans were an issue for some year 10 students but not for others, so later groups included students from years 11 and 12. The 'ex-student' groups were in some form of tertiary education. Preliminary organisation to include groups of young people who were working or unemployed was carried out but such groups did not in fact eventuate.

In the majority of cases, parents and students were interviewed in separate groups. There were three instances where parents and their children were in the same group. Ineach of these three cases, the families were Turkish, a fact which probably results from the time and venue of these particular meetings, rather than any other factor which may be specific to Turkish families. Approximately two thirds of the discussions took place during the evening, one third during the day; two took place at weekends.

Every effort was made to ensure that the views of both mothers and fathers were represented. The tendency of males to dominate discussion groups, particularly where they see themselves as speaking for the family, is well documented. We initially planned to have separate meetings of males and females and at least one mixed group in each of the NESB groups. The difficulties of contacting parents and organising appropriate times for them to meet within the time limits of the study meant that this became an ideal, rather than an actual situation. The final distribution did however include mixed and single sex groups. A little over half were mixed; there was at least one all female group in each of the NESB groups except Vietnamese; there were several Vietnamese and Chinese all-male groups. In the few cases where there was a distinct tendency for a mixed group to be dominated by one person, that person was a male. Only a few groups included husbands and wives from the same family, which might at least have reduced the tendency for husbands to speak for their wives.

ESB groups

Given the complexity of the decision making process and the number of factors which potentially affect decisions about young people's school retention and after school destination, the ESB parents and students cannot be regarded as a formal control group. They were included as a check on whether attitudes and issues in NESB families also seemed to be relevant for ESB families. Contact with parents and students was made through two schools; the first was an inner suburban school which had also been a point of contact for families from each of the NESB groups, the second was in a relatively affluent outer suburb, through which some Greek families were contacted.

Using a Discussion Group Approach

It was decided that the most appropriate approach to collecting information for the study was the organisation of discussion groups around particular issues. This was because

- the area of family values, one of the principal areas in which we were interested, is very complex and it was thought that it was more likely to be tapped by this method than by a survey or questionnaire approach;
- those taking part were to be encouraged to explore issues and exchange views;

16

- with limited time available for interviews, the views of more people were likely to be tapped with the use of less interviewer time.

The way in which the discussion groups worked and the possible effects of this on what parents and students actually said, will be mentioned if appropriate in the main body of this report. There are a number of general comments to be made at this stage.

Overall, the semi-structured discussion groups worked well. A number of parent groups continued for well beyond the expected time of an hour and a half to two hours. In the majority of parent groups, people were very willing to talk and said that they were grateful for the opportunity to air their views about some aspects of education and children's schooling. In a report of one meeting, the bi-lingual interviewer wrote:

> It is cold and wet outside, it is quite late in the evening, but maybe (because) the discussion is done by their mother tongue, these Chinese parents seem not to pay any attention (to) the weather and time; it seems that they have the intention to continue the discussion.

Interviewers remarked that frequently, they did not have to ask particular questions because the issue would come up naturally in discussion. Some issues were returned to again and again, particularly when parents had strong positive or negative views, for example concerns about homework and discipline. There were a small number of groups which did not work quite so well where, for a variety of reasons, parents were reluctant or unable to comment at length on some issues.

Some cautions

What was said by parents and students could well have been influenced by a number of factors. The actual influence of these factors is difficult to assess but they need to be kept in mind.

- Some parents and students may not have felt very relaxed in what was in fact a contrived situation. It requires a certain amount of confidence to express one's views, particularly in the presence of strangers and in front of someone who (however indirectly) represents a government body. This feeling is likely to be intensified for people who come from countries where freedom to express one's views publicly has not been part of the prevailing social and political environment. Naturally enough, particular individuals were more or less at ease within a group.
- It is possible that some parents could over-emphasise the negative opinions which they held, merely by having the opportunity to speak to someone they saw as having access to sources of authority.
- The whole area of aspirations for one's children is potentially a very emotional one. It can touch on issues of personal hopes, fears, and identity. Where people have migrated, at least in part as a result of aspirations for their children, questions about the possible future of children can be very sensitive. It would not be surprising if there were some deeply held hopes and anxieties which parents and children are not prepared to talk about in a group situation.
- An important factor in whether or not people are willing to reveal the things which are really important to them in such a discussion is their perception of the interviewer - in general terms whether the interviewer is seen as understanding their point of view. More specifically, there will be

numerous factors which affect the personal interaction between group members and interviewer. The status of the interviewer in the eyes of those in the group is crucial in determining what sort of information is obtained. The bi-lingual interviewers were thoroughly briefed about the aims of the study and all had some special knowledge of the area, but it is impossible to gauge in any detail, the particular effects of the interaction between interviewer and group members. Even if we had had available a number of interviewers of different gender, age and status, it was not always possible to know the particular composition of the group beforehand, that is, who in fact would turn up to a discussion group. The Greek, Turkish and Vietnamese bi-lingual interviewers were female and the Chinese-speaking interviewer was male.

The discussion framework

The discussion framework was based on the model outlined earlier. This proposed that the post school destinations of NESB students would be influenced by factors in the student's background, aspects of home environment and influence, school environment, and the interaction between home and school. Within each of these broad areas, a series of questions was developed. Following an initial (pilot) series of discussion groups, the discussion questions were shortened and simplified. It was apparent that more detailed focus on fewer factors was appropriate with a discussion group format. From the outset, interviewers were urged to be flexible in using the discussion framework and to regard it as a guide to the areas which should be introduced, rather than a strict set of questions to be followed. Interviewers reported that the initial detailed set of questions helped them to become familiar with the areas of interest. As they became more familiar with these areas, they used the framework more flexibly. Further, as issues began to emerge from the discussions, or to assume an importance which we had not expected, we followed them up with subsequent groups.

All discussion groups were taped in full. Sometimes, interviewers chose to make notes also. After each discussion, interviewers wrote a report from the tape, which included responses to the areas mentioned above, and any other general observations from the discussion. The project co-ordinator attended all but three or four of the discussions and talked to the interviewer about her or his impressions either then or soon after. When all interviews had been completed,the bi-lingual interviewers met and discussed their general impressions and some specific issues arising from the study.

Organising the groups

As indicated above, the study aimed to include people from a range of backgrounds and with a range of experiences. To achieve this, people in different geographical areas were contacted. Initially, schools which had a significant number of each of the NESB groups which it had been decided to include, were identified. Such an approach seemed to have a number of advantages. Schools were a potential point of contactfor parents, students and ex-students; the assistance of ethnic teacher aides could be sought to contact parents.

In reality, there were difficulties in organising discussion groups through schools and as the study proceeded, the original plan to work through schools was modified. The approach to contacting parents broadened. Community organisations, local health and family day care centres, and significant individuals were contacted as well as schools. As indicated above, the decision was made to include students in years 11 and 12 as well as year 10. In all cases, permission from parents or guardians was obtained before talking with students at school. This was considered essential because the areas of interest impinged on what might be thought personal matters within the family. It did however, make the organisation of student groups more difficult because contact with parents was reliant on their response to letters sent home with students, which is a notoriously slow and often unreliable procedure.

To summarise, the discussion groups included parents, students and ex-students from different geographical areas. The approach adopted had both advantages and disadvantages, but on the whole, those who participated were anxious to give their opinions. It was aimed to have each group include no more than six people and this was in fact the average number, although some were larger and some were smaller. As the study developed, questions and issues which had arisen in previous groups were able to be followed up.

Discussions With Individuals

The second major source of information for this report was discussions with individuals who were expected to have particular knowledge of families and young people's transition from school to after school. They included ethnic teacher aides, teachers, community leaders, and social workers. The discussions with individuals had three main aims:

- to provide relevant background information, such as the structure of the education system in the country of origin which parents in a particular ethnic group had experienced or were familiar with;
- to get comments on family decision making abouteducation and careers;
- to seek some critical evaluation and comment on the issues which arose from the group discussions.

There was therefore, a very close relationship between the group discussions and the discussions with individuals. At least half of the individual discussions were with people who assisted in contacting parents and students for the group discussions.

Organisation of the Report

Sections 2 to 6 of the report outline the results of discussions with Vietnamese, Greek, Chinese, Turkish and English-speaking background parents and young people. A summary across all groups follows and the final section discusses issues and implications from the study.

While qualitative methods can provide us with quite detailed and rich information, there are always problems of how to present the information in a coherent way, which both preserves the detail of individual situations and draws out any common threads. With this in mind, the information which was gathered through group and individual discussions with members of NESB and ESB families has been organised in the following way.

The four NESB groups and the ESB group are discussed separately. At the beginning of each section, a brief description of the participants is given. Within each group, the views of parents, students and ex-students are identified as such, but they are not presented in separate sections. This approach has been adopted in order to provide a relatively integrated narrative account. The emphasis is on parents' perceptions and the way in which they are seen to affect or influence children's school retention and post-school plans.

It will be apparent that there are slight variations in the organisation and the emphases of sections 2 to 6. They reflect the different emphases which emerged in groups, differences which are to be expected in a study which was aimed at facilitating the expression of a diversity of views.

As indicated above, the people who took part in the discussion groups are not necessarily representative of all NESB families in a particular ethnic group. No attempt was made to select a representative sample from each of the NESB populations. In addition, parent and ex-student groups were self-selected in that they were interested enough to take part. With student groups, there was some degree of compulsion, but choice was still possible (as parent approval was sought for high school students to take part in the discussions, some probably participatedagainst their will; a few exercised a choice and did not turn up for the discussion.)

Within each NESB group there is a range of socio-economic status, and educational background. In addition, participants came from a variety of geographical locations, a factor which in some NESB groups is said to correspond with different social and cultural backgrounds.

In summary, any general statements made in the following sections refer to the people with whom we spoke and not to all people of a particular NESB group. On the other hand, there is enough supporting evidence to believe that the attitudes and concerns which emerged during the discussions with parents and young people are indicative of widely held views and common issues in family decisions about youth destination.

2. Vietnamese Families

Most of the ethnic Vietnamese population in Australia arrived as refugees between 1975 and 1980 following the fall of the Saigon government. Smaller numbers arrived during the latter part of this period and since, under the Orderly Departure Program (Victorian Ethnic Affairs Commission [VEAC], 1985). Earlier arrivals were mainly urban middle class Vietnamese, while more of the later arrivals came from rural areas (Frieze, 1986). In Melbourne, settlementof Indo-Chinese people, which includes those born in Kampuchea (Cambodia) and Laos as well as Vietnam, has tended to concentrate in four main areas, although there has been a fairly wide dispersal through a large number of suburbs (VEAC, 1985:29).

All of the Vietnamese parents who participated in the group discussions were contacted through four schools in two of the main areas of Vietnamese settlement in Melbourne. Two schools were in inner suburban areas close to Housing Commission high rise flats; the other two were in south eastern suburbs which have become a centre of settlement because of the nearby Migrant Centre and proximity to employment opportunities in manufacturing. In each of the schools parents were contacted by an ethnic teacher aide who explained what the study was about and invited them to come to the school. Individual discussions were held with the teacher aide in each of the four schools, with a number of Vietnamese workers in various community organisations and with several other Vietnamese people who were expected to have some expertise in the area. As the majority of these individuals were also parents of high school children, the individual discussions focussed on their experience as parents, as well as on broader issues related to their employment or particular knowledge. Discussions were also held with a group of students from an inner suburban school and a group of tertiary students.

The Participants

Most of the parents contacted through schools were unemployed or working in unskilled occupations. All but one had arrived in Australia since 1980. They had a variety of occupations in Vietnam. Those for males included small trader, mechanic and tailor, and for females, cafeteria owner and secretary. Overall, educational levels ranged from the completion of some primary school, to a degree. Most parents had not completed secondary school. In contrast, the educational level of those who were interviewed individually, was much higher. All had completed secondary education; most had some tertiary education. The ethnic teacher aides had either been teachers in Vietnam or had tertiary training in some other area. Overall then, the group was quite diverse in educational level and occupation. Despite this, there were some attitudes and opinions which were very similar irrespective of the background of the parents.

Aspirations and Values Concerning Education

All parents, irrespective of their own education level or schooling experience, had high aspirations for their children. They wanted them to complete high school and to secure jobs which brought financial security. There were a number of rewards mentioned as following from a good education. Some parents saw it as leading to greater prestige and social status, to achieving a 'good position in society'; most related it more directly to obtaining a job which would give the sort of financial security which parents themselves felt that they did not have. There was a very strong belief that 'a good education leads to a good job and financial security'. It was hoped that children, both sons and daughters, would go 'as far as they want to and are capable of'. Several parents with tertiary education talked about the value of education for its own sake and expected their children to go on to tertiary education in the same way as they themselves had.

Most parents said that they talked to their children about the value of education and trying hard at school, and offered them as much support as they could. However, they varied in the degree to which they tried to impose direction on their children. Some said that they left decisions to their children; one father said that he was insisting that his children finish HSC so they would have that behind them when making decisions about the future. Another father said that he set aside approximately one day per month to sit down with his children and have a prolonged talk about their futures.

In general, the young people we spoke to shared the high aspirations which their parents had for them and hoped that they would get a good job which would also give them some personal satisfaction. This was particularly evident with those who had in fact reached tertiary level education. They were very clear about the value of education for obtaining a job which offered security, and the necessity of working hard to achieve this. Several students said that they thought it was very important to 'plan for the future' and to have good qualifications. Although year 10 students at the inner suburban high school wanted to succeed, and generally shared their parents' values in this way, they were less sure about their direction and about whether their schooling was going to lead them to success. Most had not made specific plans.

Young people saw parents as concerned about their personal happiness and well-being and this included a concern that to a large extent, they follow their own direction. So, although both school and tertiary students had general aspirations for the future which were similar to what their parents wanted for them, they believed that they had a choice about their future and that it was up to them to make decisions about it.

It is of course easy to relate the high aspirations which parents have for their children to the refugee experience. As one parent said, 'we want our children to be secure, after all the hardship we have been through'. Parents talked about how success for their children would make some of the difficulties that they had experienced worthwhile. They were prepared to make many sacrifices and to work very hard to provide their children with a good education. All parents stressed how important the future of their children was to them and the majority of the tertiary students echoed this concern by their own motivation to achieve qualifications for the future.

However, the value which parents placed on education is not just the result of having to leave their homeland.Some of the people we spoke to stressed that Vietnamese parents, no matter how poor they are, will almost always try to get their children a good education. They hope that their children will do better than they themselves have done, and they see education as the key to this. A number of people referred to class differences in aspirations for children, in that high educational aspirations were more widespread among middle class parents, but at the same time, they believed that many working class families make just as many sacrifices for their children's education.

The situation of parents working double or one and a half shifts in factories is not uncommon. Sometimes this is not primarily, or only, to support children in education; often it is either a matter of survival or motivated by the need to establish a future with some security. However, we spoke with a number of parents who were working much longer hours than they really wanted to in order to give children the best education they could.

Gender

Parents said that in general they did not make distinctions between girls and boys in terms of wanting them to have a good education, and that there was no difference between the level of schooling they wanted for sons and for daughters. This general point was confirmed by a number of the individuals we spoke to and some students. It was also pointed out that in Vietnam, there are strong expectations among some groups that daughters will have the same educational opportunities as sons.

The daughters of some of the parents we spoke with were succeeding well, and often in areas of study which, in Australia, are still largely considered as 'non-traditional' areas for females, that is, the maths and science subjects. In Vietnam, such areas are considered both prestigious and practically important for economic development. It is not unusual for females to go into, and do well in, areas such as engineering and electronics.

However, the fact that parents see the education of their daughters, as well as their sons, as important does not mean that the actual social, educational and personal experience of young females and males is the same. Community workers talked about the changes which coming to Australia meant for many families. Paid employment of mothers outside the home, often for the first time, together with the expectation that they will continue to run the household and care for children, has led to changes in female roles and family relationships. The implications of some of these changes for the education of girls are not yet clear but the general upheaval and readjustments are bound to affect girls' education and options for the future.

We were told that in one particular area, there was a tendency for girls to leave school as soon as they could, as work in the dressmaking and sewing trades was relatively easy to get and many families needed the income which this would bring in. Hence financial considerations may well mean that these girls have less educational options than boys because of the relatively easy access to poorly paid work.

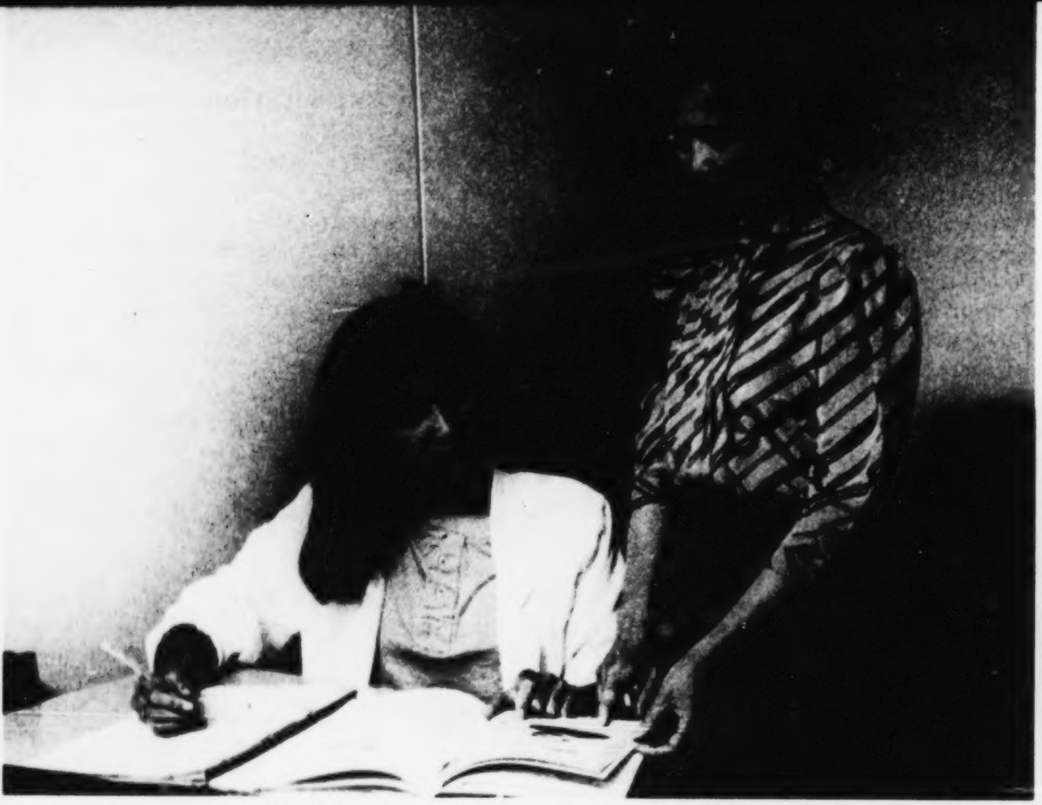
Family responsibilities and expectations about female household roles are, as in most cultures, factors in girls' education. An ethnic teacher aide mentioned a family of a father and four daughters, the eldest of whom was 15. The father was working very hard to save money to get his wife out to Australia, while the 15 year-old had primary responsibility for caring for the younger children and doing all the household chores. Although the family has been able to get occasional home help through the local council, the daughter still has to take time off from school to run the home.

The parents and young people we spoke with, to a greater or lesser extent, believed in the education system as a way of achieving some success in the future. On the other hand, there are both parents and young people, for whom educational aspirations no longer have much relevance. These people were not represented in the discussion groups and the following comments come from community workers and ethnic teacher aides. Some parents, almost always those who came from rural Vietnam and who have little formal education themselves, are caught up in the necessity or the striving to make money. They have little time to spend with children who are largely left to their own devices. This means that older children lack supervision and younger children don't have the traditional parent-child socialisation relationship through which children learn traditional ways of behaviour and respect for parents and older people. Young people therefore do not have a strong sense of self-discipline if their parents are not around to supervise and direct.

It is easy for a situation to develop where young people do not get very much out of school and have little or no commitment to education, particularly as limited English language skills may compound general alienation from the Australian culture. Formal education is not an important part of their parents' background; parents do not understand the Australian education system and for whatever reason are working long hours and are unable to supervise or guide children. Young people, again with very little formal schooling behind them, or schooling which has been interrupted by time spent in refugee camps, can very easily drop out of a system which they find difficult and alienating.

Career planning and options for the future do not have much meaning for these young people. They either drop out of school and take what work they can or they take to the streets. Most of the young people who choose, or drift onto, the streets are in Australia without parents. Their situation is particularly difficult. Often they have come to Australia believing that they will be able to take up or resume schooling, but language difficulties, serious problems of adjustment to a new system, and a background disrupted by war make this extremely difficult. In addition, when care or living arrangements with relatives break down, as they have in a number of cases, physical survival becomes the overriding concern and it is virtually impossible to remain in schooling. Zulfacar (1984) describes the problems of survival for Indo-Chinese refugee minors in New South Wales.

A particular piece of misinformation has had quite serious effects on the schooling of some Vietnamese children. Many refugees came believing that in Australia there were definite and strictly controlled ages at which students entered primary school, passed into high school and left school. Either directly because of this misinformation, or in an attempt to ensure that their children had as much schooling as they could in Australia, they declared children as two or three years younger than they really were. So, for example, a 15 year old who possibly was quite small and could pass for younger, was declared as a 12 year old and was thus eligible for a year of primary school. In some cases, this may have assisted students initially and allowed them to develop some language skills before entering high school, but it has also led to major problems with students who are now in the early or middle years of high school. Seventeen and eighteen year olds may find themselves in with much younger



children and develop quite severe psychological problems. It also left families with problems of obtaining Austudy, as students were in reality eligible but as registered, appeared to be too young. The authorities are now aware of this difficulty but it remains a severe practical problem at school level and one community worker reported that it was still difficult and very time consuming to change the registration of a child's age.

Setting Realistic Goals

There has been some anecdotal evidence from schools to suggest that along with high aspirations for children, some Vietnamese parents have quite unrealistic expectations concerning their children's achievements at school and afterwards. This did not seem to be the case for the parents and children we spoke with. Although parents wanted their children to achieve well at school and were prepared to put a lot of effort and resources into this, they were generally not unrealistic about what children could achieve, and were willing to accept that if a child was not doing well at school, they would have to settle for something less than they had hoped for that child.

Whether or not parents have realistic goals concerning the future of their children is partly dependent onboth the accuracy of the information which they get from school, and their understanding of the school system. When feedback from the school and from the student is incomplete, biased in some way, or inaccurate, it is easier for the parent to build up unrealistic expectations. Some of the misunderstandings which can occur will be discussed in greater detail in a later section.

The parents we spoke to said that they considered what their children wanted. Parents wanted their children to go as far as they could in the system; they talked to them in general terms about some preferred jobs but admitted that they would probably accept whatever their child decided upon. As far as young people were concerned, the students we spoke to certainly understood that parents wanted them to do as well aspossible, but as indicated above, they also said that ultimately it was up to them as to what they did. They accepted parent's aspirations for them as their own, but believed that within that, they were free to choose a particular focus.

Along with the high aspirations, Vietnamese students received a lot of parental encouragement and support. In some families, this role was taken by one or other parent, but in general both parents talked to children quite a lot about the future, advising them on general directions and stressing the importance of a good education.

> My parents advise me to work hard, to go as far as I can with my studies. (male school student)
>
> To my parents, my study was very important. They wantme to have a good position in this society. My parents take care of everything.All I have to do is study. (male tertiary student)

The female tertiary students we spoke to also said that their parents encouraged them and wanted them to do well but they did not volunteer statements such as the above which clearly illustrate the unequivocal support which this male student received from his parents.

High aspirations and strong encouragement to succeed can put students under a great deal of pressure and have quite negative results. Again, there is evidence that some students suffer. We were told of one student who had committed suicide, reportedly because of the extreme pressure she was under in studying something she did not really want to. However, the students we spoke to had very positive views about the encouragement and support which parents gave them. They admitted that they certainly experience some pressure on them to perform but they are generally ready to accept this pressure.

> I am happy to take that pressure becauseI know that the pressure on me is for my own benefit, so I take it. (male tertiary student)
>
> I've had pressure put on me, but when they (parents) care about you, they want you to study hard. If you get low marks, you feel guilty, you feel you let them down. (female tertiary student)

In summary, the students we spoke to shared the general aspirations which parents had for them, and they believed that their parents wanted them to be happy as well as financially secure. For these students, parental aspirations were seen as encouragement, support and urging rather than an unrealistic demand for achievement. They could thus act as a strong incentive to perform well.

A 'Very Different System'

High aspirations and encouragement are not always enough to ensure that students achieve at school or that they have an easy post-school transition. The following sections will lookat some of the ways in which Vietnamese families and the school system interact to influence the educational success and post-school options of young people.

Schooling in Vietnam

When talking about their children and the schools which they attended in Melbourne, Vietnamese parents were concerned to explain the differences between the Victorian education system and that in Vietnam. While it is not appropriate to go into a lot of detail in this report, there are a number of aspects of Vietnamese schooling which are seen as crucially different from the Victorian system and which have an impact on decisions which are made about young people's education. They can be important factors in whether or not students are successful, depending on how young people and their parents react to the differences. Several parents said that there had been some changes in the education system in Vietnam since they left. However, what is important here is the type of school which they were familiar with as children and as adults, and which now informed their views about education.

Teachers in Vietnam are highly respected and have a great deal of authority over their students. They can be very important influences on student's lives. It is not unusual for very close relationships to develop between teachers and students and be maintained for many years after schooling. One Vietnamese parent, who had in fact been a teacher herself in Vietnam, said that she still corresponded with some of her ex-teachers in Vietnam and that she in turn is treated with respect by students she has taught in the past. Occasionally, such a relationship can mean that the teacher is cared for physically or financially in old age.

Teachers are regarded as second parents and they are expected to discipline students in a 'good' way, as they would their own children, with care and understanding. Their job is not only to impart knowledge but to inculcate good behaviour and a sense of morality. Teachers themselves must be seen to be morally good and they would experience difficulty if their behaviour was otherwise. The parent mentioned above remembered dedicated teachers who did not marry and who devoted their lives to their profession.

We spoke to several parents who had been teachers in Vietnam and who had considered becoming teachers in Victoria. However, when they had seen more of Australian classrooms and playgrounds, they decided against it because it was so totally different from what they were used to. One parent spoke of her amazement the first time she sat in the back of a classroom and saw students' lack of attention to what the teacher was saying.

It is worth noting that the status of teachers in Vietnam is higher than in Australia. This is reflected in the conditions under which they work, which are more like university or college teaching in Australia. Teachers are required to be at school only for the periods they teach (about 16 per week) and they do not have to do much of the administrative work or disciplining of students which is expected in Australia. Much of this 'ancillary' work is handled by supervisors.

The authority of the teacher does not mean that the school and the teachers take over from the parents. Rather, it is expected that what the parents are trying to do and what the school is trying to do are consistent. Parents expect teachers to understand their daughters and sons, to know what is best for them educationally and to make every effort to inculcate in them the values and behaviour which they are trying to establish at home.

Teachers have great authority and power over students through monthly reports on their performance to parents. Reports are compiled from day to day performance, which means that students have to work consistently hard to keep up. It also means that parents are kept very much up to date with how their children are progressing.

Coping With the Differences

Given the differences between the Vietnamese system and the Victorian system of education, it is not surprising that some parents are disturbed by someof the things which they see happening in their children's schools. The specific reactions varied. Some were surprised or bewildered by what they saw as the too liberal attitude of schools; some were appalled; a few were angry.

It must be said at the outset that most parents took a fairly philosophical view, realising that while the system was not totally what they wanted for their children, they were no longer living in Vietnam, therefore they had to make the best of it. However, many parents were concerned about aspects of schooling. Some of the concern was clearly related to general anxiety about the directions in which they saw society moving and the effects of this on family relationships and children's futures, but they had specific anxieties about how schools might be contributing to this.

Discipline

Although comments tended to vary with the school which children went to, the most common comment was that discipline in schools was much more lax than parents wanted. Various comments were made:

> There should be more firm guidelines in the school and teachers should have more authority.
>
> Teachers should demand more respect from students and they should act to deserve this respect.
>
> Students are allowed out of school during school hours... some students play truant and parents are not informed.

Several parents from one school gave examples of students who had been absent from school for up to two weeks without the parents being informed. They also complained about lack of teacher supervision in the school grounds and in the area close to the school.

At worst, parents felt that values which were fundamental to their family structure and life were being threatened by the lack of discipline at school. One parent, who is a social worker in a community agency and meets many families who are having problems with children, believes that the lack of discipline in schools contributes to many problems at home. Children are saying that their parents are old-fashioned and should accept Australian ways.

The young people we spoke with had not rejected parental values completely and largely accepted the different discipline of school and home. However, it is apparent that in some families, parents no longer have the authority they had in Vietnam. Young people are demanding freedoms which their parents find very difficult to accept, in order to be as 'Australian' as possible.

Parents believe that when students have had some schooling in Vietnam, there is more possibility of them establishing good work habits which can be maintained. When young people have not had this grounding or their schooling has been very interrupted or disrupted, they find it very difficult to settle down to schooling, particularly when teachers are seen to lack a strong authority role. As mentioned above, lack of strong direction from the school is sometimes compounded when parents are unable to maintain their authority at home because they are working extremely long hours and young people are left largely to their own devices. In such cases, students can readily become completely alienated from school.

It is obvious that 'lack of discipline' covers a variety of dissatisfactions, all of which express parents' feelings of powerlessness and anxiety about their children. Several parents pointed out that they knew it would be different in Australia, but they believed that there should be rules which are kept and that teachers should have more control. In short, the balance between home discipline and school discipline is not sufficient for many parents. Some parents were concerned about peer group pressure and one mother said she tried to ensure that her children had 'good' friends who would be a positive influence.

One parent, who worked in the education area, explained the situation of many Vietnamese parents in the following way.

> Parents want to know how their children are behaving in school. This doesn't just mean whether they are playing up or not. They want to know about their degree of dedication to study. They would like to be able to support teachers in their approach to their children. They want to be able to 'carry on the good work of the school' at home and to make home and school consistent insupporting the child.

In speaking to Vietnamese parents, it is apparent that the rapid change in family structures and values which is being forced on them through their children's attendance at school is worrying many parents. They are used to their wishes and demands as parents being respected and not questioned. Even some parents whose children were succeeding at school and therefore adhering to parental values of hard work and commitment to study, mentioned that their children see them as strict and lacking understanding.

Both parents and children have various ways of adjusting to this situation. but for some parents, the school is at odds with the high aspirations which they have for their children, because they see teachers as not enforcing the standards of behaviour and the work habits which are necessary to succeed. There is a feeling that teachers do not really understand the moral values which Vietnamese families want for their children. As one parent said:

> Vietnamese families in general have higher expectations of their children that the average Australian family. More help and encouragementare needed from the school.

It must be emphasised that although all parents mentioned discipline as something they were concerned about, whether it was seen as a major issue or not depended on the school which students went to.

Private and public schools

Some Vietnamese parents have tried to solve what they see as the problem of lack of discipline in schools by seeking alternatives to the government school system. We were told that many Vietnamese parents would like to send their children to a non-government school because they believed that the discipline is more to their liking than in the government schools. A number of parents we spoke with had either all or some of their children in a non-government school. Some parents were able to afford to send children to independent schools by working very hard; quite a large number send children to Catholic schools.

It is worth noting that in Vietnam, government high schools are very good and there is considerable prestige attached to attending one. Entry is highly competitive; government schools have a very strong academic curriculum and a high pass rate.The standard of the many privately run schools is more varied.

The belief that non-government schools have a stricter approach to general behaviour and application to work is clearly a major factor in Vietnamese parents deciding to send their daughters and sons to such schools. Parents talk to friends and find out about different schools and are told that Catholic schools have a tighter discipline.

The religious affiliation does not generally cause major problems for families. Some Vietnamese are Catholic anyway. Those who are Buddhist or worship the ancestors are relatively flexible and adaptable in their approach to their worship. Buddhism is very tolerant of differences and not at all dogmatic. One person did suggest that sending children to a Christian school was difficult for some parents, but it was something which they felt bound to do because of their concern about discipline in the government schools.

Home and School Interaction

A small number of schools have made significant efforts to involve parents from different ethnic groups in the life of the school and in the decision making processes. All of the Vietnamese parents we spoke to were sufficiently interested in their children's education to spend some hours with us (sometimes on a cold and windy night) talking about it. However, most of them had a fairly limited involvement in their children's school beyond that. They visited the school for report nights or the occasional information night, and several of them had come to the school at the invitation of a teacher at least once. A minority were quite regular attenders at specially organised parent meetings.

Understanding

Contact and co-operation between home and school is obviously not a guarantee of positive outcomes for the student. This is far too simple an approach. However, it was clearthat parents in this study were more satisfied with the school generally and more satisfied that the school was preparing their children adequately for the future if they thought that the teachers had some understanding of the needs of Vietnamese families. This did not have to be complete understanding. As long as it was thought that there were teachers who were genuinely interested in their children and concerned about the family needs, parents tended to be more satisfied. There was some support for this from ex-students who certainly made distinctions between teachers who were genuinely interested in them and those who weren't. One parent talked about the need for teachers to understand the learning difficulties which students have:

> Some teachers are good, others are not capable of understanding...they are not interested. They should give more careful and repeated explanations of things students don't understand.

A number of high school students thought that only a minority of their teachers really understand, or make an effort to understand, Vietnamese students' backgrounds. However, some teachers were 'quite nice and willing to help us'.

Parent participation

The general reasons why most parents have fairly limited contact with schools are well known. These include lack of available time and language difficulties, which are certainly key factors with many Vietnamese parents. Those who arrived as refugees with few resources are engaged in the struggle to establish themselves and continue support for family members in Vietnam. Some schools have made conscientious efforts to contact parents at suitable times and to translate written material which goes to parents. Ethnic teacher aides can be crucial in the contacts between school and parents. In several schools which we visited it was obvious that strong personal links had been established between parents and teacher aides. Even so, we were told that some parents were angry at what they saw as an unreasonable number of requests to participate in school activities and attend meetings. Parents see teachers as not understanding that they are working very hard to keep theirfamilies and do not have the time to attend school functions. There can be an even bigger problem when parents have children at a number of different schools and they are faced with requests from each of these schools.

Parent participation and the sort of consultation which some schools are encouraging is foreign to many Vietnamese parents. In Vietnam, there is no role for parents to actively participate in their children's schooling, no model for the sort of parent participation which is encouraged here. Many Vietnamese parents see educational issues as matters for the school and the teachers who are the professionals. This is particularly so with people who come from rural areas, have been to primary school only, and have little idea of how schools operate. At the same time, they may feel guilty about the fact that they cannot respond to requests from the school.

When there is interaction between schools and parents it can however, be very complex and subject to all sorts of misunderstandings and misinterpretations. We heard a number of stories of Vietnamese parents becoming frustrated and confused after contacts with the school. Many of them seem to be the result of cultural differences and lack of communication between parents and schools.

A community worker mentioned a Vietnamese father who received many requests and felt guilty that he could not go to his children's school, so when he finally had a day off work he decided to respond to one of the requests from the school and came to speakto the community worker about it. When she told him the request was to do with folk dancing classes he was very angry and confused that the school should be contacting him about such a matter.

Several ethnic teacher aides mentioned that some parents are anxious and confused when they are asked to come to the school for some matter related to their daughter or son. In Vietnam, they are not used to having problems with children at school; if parents are asked to come to the school, they assume that there is a major problem with the student. This is often not the case in Australia and the parent feels that the school should have handled the matter without contacting the home.

Vietnam has a very centralised system of curriculum planning and development. Therefore, parents are not used to the school having the degree of control over the curriculum which Victorian schools have and many do not feel confident in taking part in curriculum debates.

When parents are asked to make decisions about subject options for their daughters or sons, they can become angry and confused. They may not understand what the subject involves; they may not think that it is at all relevant educationally; they do not believe that it is their province to make such decisions about curriculum anyway. We were told of parents at one school who, when presented with a list of electives to choose from, could find only motor mechanics which seemed to have any practical use. So, the majority of Vietnamese students chose to do this option. As numbers were limited, many students missed out.

Student reports

Student reports are a very vexed issue for some parents. As noted earlier, in Vietnam parents receive regular, detailed and specific information about how their children are progressing. In Australia, they feel that the reports which they receive from schools are often meaningless and sometimes very misleading. Comments on reports are general, qualitative and difficult for parents to interpret when they do not know the general standard of students. The fact that most schools do not grade at all makes interpretation much more difficult for parents.

There is also misunderstanding about student ability. Some parents said that they received reports about their daughters or sons saying that they are working hard and doing well. On the basis of this, they have high expectations that their children willsucceed at HSC. However, during year 11, when it is time to make some decisions, parents are told that their children should think about leaving school, very often because their English is not good enough for HSC. It may be that the earlier reports have referred to English as a Second Language (ESL) and the parent doesn't realise that even if the child does well in ESL classes, they can still be a long way behind a good standard of English. Or it may be that the schools are reluctant to say that students are doing poorly. We heard of one example of a Vietnamese boy who was causing a lot of trouble in class yet received a good report at the end of the year. When questioned by a teacher aide as to why this was so, the reply was that his teachers thought a bad report would destroy his confidence.

A number of parents were concerned that the transition from year 10 to year 11 was far too abrupt. The demands put on students up to year 10 were not hard at all. Students were allowed to drift and not do very much work. But when they reached year 11, they were suddenly asked to do much more homework; the standard of work required was much higher. One mother said:

> There is too much play and not enough homework in year 10, but in year 11 my daughter has to swot for exams.

Both parents and students were concerned about the rapid transition and believed that it was essential to have a more gradual introduction to the demands of year 11.

The parents we spoke to were clear that they needed to know exactly how their children are going; if they don't, they are forced to adjust their expectations and to reassess what the future can bring. This causes anger and can be a very painful experience. It also allows students to think that they are capable of achieving well, when they will in fact have to work much harder.

Families frequently decide that extra tuition is necessary and they take on the expense of a private tutor. Information about good tutors is shared by families. This continues a practice which is common in Vietnam where there is a well developed systemof private tutoring in the most difficult subjects, maths, science and chemistry.

Restricted Options?

There are a number of factors which operate to restrict the career options of Vietnamese students. Parents tend to favour the 'hard' subjects such as maths and science rather than subjects such as art and drama, because the former can more readily be seen to lead to prestigious, secure and valued jobs. Covertly and overtly, they try to steer their children into these areas. Areas such as art and drama were not considered very practical or useful, and according to one parent, not treated very seriously as school subjects. There are other very practical reasons for the emphasis on maths and science. It is difficult for Vietnamese students to get really high marks in English or in subjects which demand a facility with English. On the other hand, high marks in science subjects can be the entree into tertiary courses. In addition, parents wish to help their children as much as they can, and lacking facility in English themselves, maths and science are generally the only areas in which they feel they can be of any help. Finally, schools sometime direct students into these areas if they think that their English is not good enough for humanities subjects. (On the other hand, the principal of one school said that it was the students who really wanted to do maths and science and the staff who were really trying to encouragea greater emphasis on the humanities.)

A Vietnamese professional, who had contact with many parents, made the more general point that parents lack information about a wide range of possible occupations. This tends to restrict the areas on which both parents and students focus. In the extreme cases, young people may find themselves working extremely hard to succeed in an area which does not really interest them, with disastrous personal and family consequences.

Availability of Information

Access to information about the education system and career options is not a guarantee of success for students but it can make the schooling process, the transition from school and the choice of after-school pathway smoother and more likely to lead to success. The choices which students and parents make at various points during the years of schooling can be very important for future options and directions and they need to be based on as full and accurate information as possible.

It was suggested to us by several people that whereas information about welfare matters and the labour market is beginning to be quite widespread and information networks operate relatively effectively in the Vietnamese community, this is not yet the case with education. Much still needs to be done. Cultural differences between the two systems of education are great and lack of information about schools and schooling disadvantages many students.

There were great differences in the amount of information which individual parents had about schools and about the education system generally. There was a close relationship between parent's education level and the amount of information which they had. Those who had tertiary training, and particularly those who had been teachers, had a much greater general familiarity with the system than those who had little formal education.

If a family spent time in a hostel after arrival in Australia they would have been given general information about Australian society. However, as far as education is concerned, the focus tends to be on the immediate issue of access to English classes. General information about schools means very little without some direct experiences of Australian schools. It is only later that specific questions arise.

Generally, the first Australian school to which students go is governed by parents' first place of residence. Those who were part of the first wave of refugees had little information to guide them. Where parents have not had a secondary education themselves, they have a very limited framework against which to judge the Victorian system anyway, even if they did have information. One tertiary student recalled:

> ...we had very little knowledge of the schools around us and we did have some advice from (someone from the church)... He said if you go to a technical school, even if you fail form 5, you can still catch up. If you go to a high school and you fail year 12 and you don't want to take up more study, what can you do? You have no base training. What can you do? At technical school, you learn practical things, so you can do things like carpentry.

Almost all the parents we spoke with said that there was a lot about schools that they did not know. There was heavy reliance on the school to do the right thing by students and to give them accurate and appropriate information about choices and options. A number of the parents were concerned that they could only talk to their children in fairly general terms about what was happening in school and about plans for the future. They could not help with the details. Lack of information was compounded when parents had very little education themselves and felt reticent about commenting on some aspects of what the school was doing, or about advising their children.

One parent who was well informed about the Australian education system, suggested that in addition to the reasons already mentioned, the focus on a relatively small number of status occupations was partly due to the fact that, across the board Vietnamese parents lack information about schools, options and pre-requisites. Hard work is often seen as the answer to a lot of problems, including lack of information, and is part of the reason why application to schooling and good work habits are seen as so important for students.

The two main sources of information for the parents we spoke to were the general resources of the school, and friends. In addition, some parents sought help and advice from community agencies, welfare agencies, and ethnic teacher aides where the school had one. In some schools, teacher aides played a major part in advising families and were very important in maintaining contact between school and home. This is principally because they speak the parents' language but also because in some schools they have more time available than a class room teacher to talk with parents. However, this is not a perfect solution. Firstly, there are many parents who do not have the confidence to come to the school or the time because they are working. Secondly, ethnic teacher aides are often overworked and expected to spread themselves very thinly. Finally, Vietnamese parents have a specific complaint that the Ministry of Education has tended to employ Chinese Vietnamese aides to cater for both ethnic Vietnamese and Chinese Vietnamese students and parents. This causes some problems according to Vietnamese parents because although Chinese aides speak Vietnamese adequately, their knowledge of the written language is not necessarily good. Vietnamese parents were sometimes critical of the translated notices they received from schools.

Parents expressed varying degrees of satisfaction about the amount and type of information the school provided on careers and post-school options. Again, the response tended to vary with the school. Parents at one school thought that the information was too generaland very much dependent on individual teachers, some giving more guidance than others. These parents wanted more specific information. Parents at another school expressed general satisfaction but had little idea of what the school actually provided. At yet another school, parents were obviously aware of the work experience and career guidance programs which the school ran, but thought that other approaches such as talks from a variety of professionals could be used (despite some specific complaints, the parents from this school thought that it was a 'good school' and that teachers understood what parents wanted for their children).

Many parents place great reliance on the school to give the student appropriate information and advice.

> I am unsure what my child needs to know. I just hope that teachers give him enough information.

Although for some families, schools are the first point of information about matters relating to schooling and careers, information which is shared among friends and acquaintances is also very important. This was mentioned particularly by workers in community agencies who came into contact with many families and who were themselves parents. Information about schools, tutors, options, courses, and prerequisites was shared and passed on informally. Because of their concern about education and their interest in their children's futures, parents seek out information about schools and careers wherever they can.

Making Decisions

The students at tertiary level to whom we spoke felt that the business of making a decision about their future rested very firmly with them. Parents had indeed been very encouraging and supportive, but ithad been up to them to seek out specific information about 'how to do it', about possible careers, available courses, requirements and application procedures. Several students had found careers teachers very helpful.

> I made the decision (to do maths and computing) myself. My parents would like me to do some engineering but to do well, you have to have an interest in what you are doing. The careers teacher at the school was very helpful. I went to see her and got

> basic information about courses. It's up to the student to go to the careers teacher or other teachers to get information. I didn't talk to my parents much about a particular career. (male student)

Other students had found friends helpful:

> Friends give you information about courses, sometimes they influence you (about a particularcourse) but you have to make your own decision. (male student)

It was obvious that students shared a great deal of information among themselves and certainly in the latter years of schooling, talked about career possibilities with friends. Decisions about careers and tertiary study were taken very seriously. Young people require a fair degree of confidence and understanding of the system to handle this transition from school to post-school. In addition, at some stage in their schooling, they need to develop confidence in their ability to succeed and to succeed in their chosen area. The role of the school and of individual teachers is of crucial importance. The comments of one female student who is studying maths and computing at tertiary level illustrates such a positive outcome:

> I chose to do maths and computing because I was good at it at school...You know when you are at school what you are good at.

Unfortunately, many young people are not able to get such a sense of what they are good at when they are at school. There were some indications that the Vietnamese students we spoke to in year 10 did not yet have a feeling of confidence in themselves, nor did they feel that they had much control over their schooling:

> I'm not confident that what I'm doing will enable me to do what I want to later.
>
> There is a range of subjects being offered at school but for some unknown reason, I've been pushed into some subjects I don't like and also have been told that another subject I prefer cannot be taught until later (or not at all).

When parents do not have much understanding of the system and rely on their children to pass on information from the school, students can of course be selective in what they pass on, either consciously or unconsciously. The tertiary students we spoke with believed that this was a problem only when the student wasn't working and therefore had something to hide, or when parents put too much pressure on their children and the children had to find some way of getting around this pressure. Both of these situations were likely to have a negative effect on the student's performance and his or her future.

For young people in Australia without their parents, not performing well at school provides a particularly difficult situation. Parents back in Vietnam have high hopes for the future of their children and strong expectations that if they are successful, they can assist other family members to come to Australia. If a son is not doing well (and it is young males who are most frequently in this situation), he may write untruths to his family about how he is going or, as in one extreme case we were told about, cut himself off from the family in order to avoid disappointing them. This causes great sadness and pain for all involved.

The issue of Vietnamese parents' lack of information about the Victorian system of education is being tackled by the Vietnamese Teachers Association which was established in 1986. Members of the Association are mostly teachers who were trained in Vietnam. They have begun distributing a newsletter to schools where there are Vietnamese students, to Vietnamese teacher aides, and to individual Vietnamese parents. The newsletter contains information about matters of educational interest such as the recent accrediting of Vietnamese as a group 1 HSC (VCE) subject. It is designed to fill an information gap for Vietnamese families and to help them make more informed decisions about their children's futures.

Summary

Many young Vietnamese people are supported and encouraged by parents, who generally have high educational aspirations for them. In turn students are frequently prepared to work hard to achieve, for themselves as well as for their parents. Understandingof the education system and access to information is greater for parents with ahigher educational background. On the other hand, there are a number of family factors which, together with the general difficulties of communication between school and home, make the post-school options for some Vietnamese students very limited. These factors include parents' absorption in financial survival, expectations based on limited understanding of the school system, lack of access to accurate information and young people's alienation from both traditional family values and the education system.

3. Greek Families

Migration from Greece to Australia began before the turn of the century but it was not until the post-second world war period that significant numbers of Greek settlers arrived (Bottomley, 1979). The large numbers of post-war migrants came as a result of Australian government policies which emphasised-industrial requirements. This is reflected in the fact that during the 1960's, 75 per cent of Greek migrants who arrived in Australia came as unskilled workers (Storer, 1981:3). Twenty years on, that part of the Australian population which has a Greek background has become much more diverse.

For the present study, Greek parents were contacted through six schools and one women's organisation. Two of the schools were in inner suburban areas with a high and diverse migrant population; one in the western suburbs; one in a south eastern suburb with a high Indo-Chinese population, and the remaining schools in two of the eastern suburban areas where Greek families have tended to settle in recent years. In four schools, a letter asking for co-operation in the study was distributed to all Greek students in year 10 and interested parents were then contacted. In the other two schools, both of which have a relatively active Greek parents group, the Greek teacher aide in one case and a Greek teacher in the other, contacted parents. Two of the seven groups were all female (one group from a school, the other from thewomen's organisation); five had approximately equal numbers of males and females. Students from three of the schools (one inner surburban, one south eastern and the eastern surburban school) were interviewed and individual discussions were held with a number of teacher aides, community workers and young Greek people who were working in the social welfare area.

The Participants

As expected, the number of years since parents had arrived in Australia varied considerably (from one year to 33 years). However, approximately half of the 48 parents who participated in the discussion groups arrived between 1960 and 1970. The level of education reached ranged from the completion of some primary school (approximately 16 per cent) to completion of a degree or diploma (approximately 12 per cent), but over half had not completed secondary education. The majority of parents had not had schooling in Australia. Parents' employment included skilled and semi-skilled jobs (welder, cabinet maker, seamstress), unskilled (cleaner, labourer), and a sprinkling of occupations which require tertiary training, such as teacher and librarian. A little more than half of the females were engaged in home duties.

The original decision to include families of Greek speaking background in the study was based on the desirability of including individuals from an ethnic group which has been present in Australia for a considerable time. There is research evidence, as well as a common sense argument to suggest that length of time in Australia is an important factor in children's retention at school and hence their post-school destinations. The research regarding retention is summarised by Sturman (1985:41ff).

Given the scope of the study, it is not possible to explore in any detail the effect of length of residence in Australia. However, there is clearly a difference in the experiences of a family in which the children were born in Australia of parents who arrived in Australia as children some thirty years ago, and a family in which the parents arrived fifteen years ago as adults. The precise effect this has on family decisions about children's retention in school and their post-school futures is another question, although some general comments have emerged from the discussions with Greek families and other individuals.

Aspirations and Values Concerning Education

Across the board, the Greek parents we spoke with believed that a good education was very important for young people's futures. Some believed that it was the best preparation one could have; that even if sons or daughters did not go on to tertiary study, it was good for them to finish high school as they would benefit as people. There was a tendency for parents to generalise about the attitude of all Greek parents. Not only did they say that children's education was important to them personally; they made general statements about Greeks to indicate that it was an accepted fact that:

> All Greek parents want the best for their children. They want them to do well, to get a good education and a good job.

In some groups there was quite a lot of discussion about the importance of a good education. Almost everyone related it in some way to improved job prospects. The higher the education, the more 'doors would be opened', and the better the job opportunities. Completion of year 12 was generally seen as a minimum requirement and many parents wanted their childrento go on to some sort of tertiary study. There were other benefits seen in staying on at school as long as possible. Education 'broadened horizons'; it meant children would grow up 'better people' in society.

There was a very clear and frequently stated hope from parents that a good education would mean that their children would not have to work at the sort of tiring and repetitive factory jobs which many of them had had to do. Young people had obviously had this said to them frequently and were quick to explain their parents' high aspirations for them in terms of avoidance of factory work. 'Our parents worked in the factory and they don't want us to.' was a common statement.

A number of parents stated quite strongly (and again it was recognised by young people) that migration to Australia had been motivated in large part by a desire to build a better life for themselves and their children, that many sacrifices had been made, and they wanted their children to have more chances than they had had. If children did well and were successful at school, for parents it meant not only that their children would reap personal benefits, but it also reflected well on the family. Individual happiness was important, but educational success also meant increased status for the family within the Greek community.

While education was very important, it was not the only aspiration which parents had for their children. Many people placed as much, or more, emphasis on children developing into good people, responsible and moral citizens, balanced individuals. The majority of parents were clearly concerned about the happiness and well-being of their children and the young people we spoke to generally had an appreciation and understanding of this concern.

Parents had varying views about the relative importance of education for girls and for boys but at the same time there were some quite well defined trends. Typical views across all groups are outlined below.

- Some parents acknowledged that there had been changes in society and in people's attitudes generally, which now made it both more important and more possible for girls to go on with education to the limits of their capabilities. One mother thought that it was important for girls to be well educated because 'an educated woman breeds educated children'. Another thought that girls should not be discriminated against and especially not by their own parents. However, the main argument put forward for the importance of girls' education was the need for girls to have the means of being independent.

> Education is as important for girls as for boys as it gives them independence. Women can no longer rely on marriage as there are many broken marriages and therefore education can provide them with some sort of security in the future.

- Several parents thought that it was important for women to be educated because most would become wives and mothers. In this way they would be able to help their children with their education. The parents who put forward this view said that it partly grew out of their own experience. They believed that if they had achieved a certain level of education they would be able to help their children much more with school work. The same parents remarked that educated children made better, more honest and upstanding citizens and this was important whatever the sex of the child.
- The most commonly expressed view was that although it was important for both boys and girls to be educated, it was more important for boys as they will be financially responsible for their families. Daughters will eventually 'stop working' and become mothers and homemakers so in that regard, an education is not crucial. What is crucial is that they be good wives and mothers. One father who held this view added that despite the changes which women's liberation had meant, most girls will 'get married and be looked after'.
- Several mothers hoped that their daughters would do well in their schooling, but they were more concerned that they achieved a good marriage.

> It's important that girls be educated but it's probably more important that they marry well.

- Finally, there were a few fathers who clearly stated that boys' education was more important than girls', as 'girls will eventually get married and have children.'

The group which as a whole was most strongly in support of girls and boys being given equal educational opportunities was an all women's group, in which a relatively high proportion of the women had completed secondary or tertiary education. They mentioned what they believed were some of the more subtle ways in which Greek boys were encouraged and Greek girls were not given so much encouragement.

> What they (some parents) usually say is that if the girl hasn't got the capabilities,

> then its OK because she can find herself a rich husband. If she has the ability its OK but if she hasn't got the ability, then there's more pressure for her to leave school.
>
> Parents use it as an excuse or a defence. If their daughter gets low marks they say, 'well, it doesn't matter, she can marry someone' but (if their son gets low marks) they say 'my son has to improve. We can get a tutor for my son because he needs the education, he will be the breadwinner.'

The view of some of the parents we spoke with is probably summed up in the comment that every encouragement would be given to a daughter if she really wanted to go to University but, 'if she didn't want to, then it wouldn't be the end of the world.'

Financial considerations can be a major limiting factor to daughters going on to further education. One parent said that if money was limited and it was a choice between tertiary education for a son or a daughter, the son would almost certainly be supported. The experience of one young woman, who is now in a professional position, illustrated one effect of the length of residence and increasing financial security on the education of sons and daughters. Her three older sisters all had to go to work at a relatively early age to help the family finances, but she and her brother, who reached adolescence at a time when the family was much better off, went to tertiary institutions.

Sorting Out What is Possible

While the parents we spoke with wanted their children to have a good education and encouraged them to work hard, they believed that the level and standard their children achieved was dependent on their capabilities. If a child was capable of going on to tertiary education, they would do everything they could to support that child, but if the ability was not there, they hoped they would get a job with a secure future. Some parents said they realised that their sons would probably be tradesmen or have some sort of manual job, even though they would like to see them go further with their education (they did not mention a comparable future for a daughter).

One person who counselled many young Greek people about employment opportunities said that his experience was that parents who came with their children to see him, often had a desirable range of occupations for their son or daughter and an acceptable range. The desirable was encouraged at first, but if the young person did not look like achieving something in this category, there was a range of acceptable alternatives to fall back on. This was certainly the case with both some of the parents and some of the young people we spoke to. Parents might be hoping for a tertiary trained occupation but the majority saw their sons and daughters as 'average' students and were prepared to settle for something else. Similarly, some of the year 10 students said they would like to complete year 12, but were doubtful that they would. One student hoped for a future in engineering but had contingency plans for training as an electrician or amechanic if he didn't make it.

Some parents believed that one of the worst things they could do was to force a child to study because it turned the child away from learning; others believed that it was part of their duty as parents to keep their sons and daughters up to the mark. Similarly, some parents were prepared to see their children leave at year 10 level while a small number said that they would insist that children stayed on to year 12, even if they really didn't want to.

Several women in the all women's group mentioned that there were certainly Greek parents who made unrealistic demands on their children. One person in this group firmly believed that some Greek parents made the mistake of pre-planning their children's futures and putting too much pressure on them. These people expected their sons to become lawyers and doctors, and could not accept it when they did not get high marks. This, she thought, brought only frustration and pain for both parents and children (daughters' academic achievements were presumably not so important for such parents.) Another parent thought though, that this sort of attitude was changing and that the majority of Greek parents now allowed sons and daughters to make up their own minds.

> They (parents) have become more flexible. They don't say you've got to do this, you've got to do that.

There was plenty of evidence that this was so. As far as specific occupations were concerned, the parents we spoke with accepted that their children were going to make decisions of their own. They might hope for certain outcomes, they encouraged and perhaps pushed in certain directions, but they realised that ultimately, it was the choice of the young person. A number of parents were conscious of trying to influence children in a subtle way, rather than being directive. They did not tell their children outright what to do. They believed that their role was to advise and to step in only if their children looked like making a bad mistake.

One person expressed a view which was contrary to what she thought was the stereotype of Greek parents pushing their children to achieve. From her experience as a Greek teacher aide, she felt that parents sometimes did not push their children enough and when they did, it was not always in the most appropriate direction because they often did not have the right information to do so and they could be misled by what the school said.

How do young people interpret their parents' aspirations for them? As already indicated, we found that they understood very clearly their parents need to have them avoid factory work. They knew that their parents were motivated by a concern for their future; they knew that they were expected to work hard at school and to achieve as high marks as they could. Most of the students thought that their parents wanted them to complete year 12, although some doubted that they would succeed at that level. They believed that parents were willing to support them and encourage them even if they couldn't always help with particular information.

There was a suggestion in the comments of students we spoke to that some young boys felt their parents were expecting too much of them. While girls thought that their parents saw their personal happiness in the future as very important, boys tended to see parents as emphasising a good education and a good job and several of them were certainly aware of high expectations placed on them.

> My father talks to me a lot (about the future). He wants me to go to College and it's important that I do well. He makes me feel anxious.
>
> My parents expect a lot of me. If I get an A, they want to know why it isn't an A+. An A's an A as far as I am concerned.

The latter student wanted to go into an apprenticeship and he was very aware that his father wanted him to finish HSC and go on to College. There are questions here which unfortunately it was not possible to follow up in the group discussion. Was this student planning on an apprenticeship because this was really what he wanted to do, because he was making a realistic assessment of what he was capable of, as an insurance policy against failure at HSC level, in order to make a stand which was independent of his parents and their wishes, or because of a mixture of these reasons? How will this young person sort out his personal preferences, the picture of his own capabilities which he is building up from his performance at school and the reaction of teachers to him, and what he has learnt from his family?

Several of the girls were obviously aware of the issues concerning differences between 'male jobs' and 'female jobs', but they thought that parents would not encourage them to go into non-traditional occupations and they themselves were not keen to do so. Those who had some ideas about what they wanted to do (and at year 10, there was still a great deal of uncertainty), mentioned such occupations as secretary, dental nurse and teacher, and several said that they planned to finish HSC, then decide what to do.

In general, apart from the pressures mentioned by the two boys above, both students and their parents said that there were no serious differences between them about the future. Some parents thought that their children frequently changed their mind about what they wanted to do, but they saw this as normal. Others had some disagreements about future plans but said that they did not usually develop into serious disagreements.

Parents' Influence

It seemed that discussion and general comments about young people's futures went on in most families. Sometimes this was quite deliberate influence on the part of parents who would talk about the importance of working hard and doing well; at other times, parents tried to influence by example and by reference to other people who had done well. Advice was frequently offered. There was no clear pattern of fathers or mothers having the most important role here. In some families it was the father, in others it was the mother because the father was at work and didn't spend as much time with the children as the mother did. Sometimes, it was both mother and father.

Some young people who had already left school recalled the strong community and group pressures which operated in their adolescence and which they believed still operate now. Much talking and comparing of the performance of children goes on between parents. A lot of the encouragement these young people received was related to the success of what others had done. They felt subtle pressures in the way parents talked about the value of education and the importance of working hard.When some of these young people went on to tertiary education they in turn were used as examples for younger children.

One parent said that a mixture of encouragement, pushing and a bit of bribery ('I'll buy you a car if you pass HSC') was used to influence her children. She described her efforts with her son in the following way:

> I said 'Now you are building your life and it depends what foundation you want to make. If you want to make something bigger, you've got to work harder and build good foundations. Depends on you.' I never pushed him. I said, 'Do something because you

43

like it, because you will live with it'. I want my son to do something so he can live comfortably and be happy and have a good family.

Home and School Interaction

Some parents talked at length about their concern that Greek family values were breaking down, or were being severely threatened and that schools were playing a major part in this. The concern emerged in a number of ways and, as with other issues, parents spoke not just for themselves, but generalised to say that many Greek parents were feeling this way.

The world outside the home

Firstly, some parents were anxious about the influence of the 'world outside the home'. One mother said that she knows what goes on inside her home and she has some control over what her son does there. But once he is outside that sphere of influence, she doesn't know what is going on and this makes her anxious. The school is one of the main threats, because it teaches values whichshe does not always agree with, some of which are 'totally contrary to the Greek way of thinking'. School also puts her son in contact with a peer group who come from families with values and rules which are different from hers.

This mother thought that schools were an important contributing factor to the 'Australianisation' of Greek children, which made it very difficult for Greek parents to maintain the sort of discipline they believed was necessary for bringing up a child. At worst this begins a major rift between parents and children. Further, this parent was concerned that children do not understand their parents and parents do not understand the environment in which their children are moving. Children love their parents, but the strong influence of school (together with other influences) leads them to question their parents and demand rights which parents are very reluctant to go along with.

Another mother said that even though her son was capable of going to University she would think twice about allowing him to go because of what he would encounter there. She was afraid of drugs and the sort of people he would meet there. Her fear of the bad influence which he may find there was so great that she admitted she would rather see her son work a lot harder in a factory to earn his living than go to University and become involved with drugs and influenced by 'bad crowds'. This, she said, was despite the fact that she believed that University trained people were very useful to society.

A further example was a father who believed that in the home he could discipline his children, as well as outline the morals and standards which he expected but all his 'good work was undone at school'. Parents explained that many believed strict discipline was very important for young children and adolescents and it was easy for schools to undermine the parents' authority.

Several parents voiced a specific concern that their children did not seem to be interested in working at school. One mother was very unhappy that her son was not doing well at school but she felt fairly helpless to do much about it. She felt that teachers were not able to instill good work habits in him and nor was she. Basically, her son just 'didn't want to work' and the school was partly to blame.

Not all parents were as concerned as those mentioned above, but overall there was a recognition of the difficulties of keeping children on the track which would lead them to value education, to stay at school and hopefully to get a good job. One mother expressed it this way:

> There are a lot of problems and worries (with boys) in high schoolright now. We try to keep them on the right track, interested as much as we can, away from drugs etc...

The difficulties which are caused for both parents andchildren by conflicting home and school values are obviously handled by different families in different ways. This report is concerned with them only in so far as they have an influence on whether children stay on at school and what they do when they leave school. Our study certainly does not allow the effect of conflict between children and parents to be sorted out from other factors. Several of the young people we spoke to who had tertiary training and were now employed said that even though they found school very different from home, they did not experience much conflict with parents. They recalled that they accepted their parents' values and they were mainly concerned with working hard to survive the school years.

Year 10 students seemed to be able to hold the two sets of values together. With varying degrees of emphasis, several of them thought that their parents were 'old-fashioned', 'talked about Greece all the time' and didn't realise that 'times have changed'. However, again in varying degrees, they respected their parents and appreciated their support (five of this group had visited Greece as young children and were very interested in going again, partly because their parents talked about it a lot). One girl commented about the fact that her father came up to school uninvited one day to see how she was going, 'it makes me feel happy to know that my parents care.'

The experience of the parents and young people who participated in this study is obviously only part of the story. There are plenty of situations where conflict between home and school values could become a major factor in the path which students take.

Discipline

Nearly all of the parents who took part in discussions had some criticism to make about discipline in the schools which their children attended. During discussions with parents, the bi-lingual interviewer gained the impression that there were quite a lot of things about their children's schools which parents were dissatisfied with but reticent to talk about for whatever reason. They were certainly not reluctant to talk about discipline.

Parents thought that teachers did not exercise enough discipline; teachers were too relaxed and allowed children to get away with too much. A number of parents mentioned specifically that good behaviour should be taught at school as well as at home. They thought that schools were generally not concerned with teaching moral behaviour or respect for older people.

Behaviour which was observed in the grounds of the school, such as smoking and students kissing and cuddling also came in for comment. Parents believed that teachers should take more care to see that this did not happen, particularly as it was a bad example for younger students.

The issue of inadequate discipline flowed over into comments about uniforms and homework. Some saw lack of uniform as symptomatic of lax discipline. They believed that if children had to wear a uniform, they would be more controlled in their behaviour and more visible so that behaviour like smoking would be easier to police.

Homework

There was particular concern about homework, or more specifically, the lack of enough homework. For parents, homework is often the most visible evidence that their children are in fact 'doing something' at school. As well, it was regarded by some parents as a necessary part of learning. Homework was seen as the practice part of learning, going over, repeating and extending what was learnt at school. Even if a parent doesn't understand the work their children are doing, and is unable to help with details, homework at least gives some clues as to what the school expects of young people. When parents don't see any evidence of homework, or they are told by their children that it has been done at school, they are denied this information. For some parents, no homework meant one of two things; either the school was failing in its job, or the student was lazy. Both of these were cause for concern. Most of the students said that parents enquired about homework; a few had homework fairly strictly controlled in that they were not allowed to watch television until it was completed every day.

Individualism

A few parents identified another way in which the school values tended to be at odds with the values of Greek families. The strong sense of community and co-operativeness which still largely exists in the Greek community contrasts with the autonomy and individualism of the Australian culture and the school environment. Schools placed greater emphasis on individualism than community and there was a fear that family and community were devalued and that children would become isolated from families. One of the parents who mentioned this did so when the group was discussing information which parents and students had about schooling or careers. She believed that it did not help Greek children to make good decisions when schools disregarded the family.

> (Greeks)... give very big importance to the family, which schools seem to disregard so far...Schools encourage kids to be so independent, the kids tend to disregard what the parents say.

Equally, it was pointed out that if children fail, it affects the life of the whole family.

School understanding of Greek families

Given the above comments, it would not be surprising to find that parents and children feel that schools do not understand the needs of Greek families and students. Those who took part in the discussions certainly believed this to some extent but reactions were somewhat mixed and parents did not see the question as a simple one.

Despite specific complaints, quite a number of parents across all the schools, thought that the teachers probably did their best to understand Greek family needs. This does not mean that parents were completely satisfied with their children's schooling and preparation for the future as is obvious from some of the commentsreported here.

Parents at one school agreed that it was difficult for **them** to figure out what their needs were, given the problems of bringing up children in 'two cultures and two countries'. So it was no doubt difficult for the school.

Some parents mentioned, with a touch of ironic humour, that it was very difficult to understand the Greek mind anyway, so perhaps it was expecting too much, since not even Greeks really understood it! One mother believed that teachers and schools had some understanding, but really didn't want to get involved enough to consider the child as part of a family. She also wondered how much a teacher could really do and she thought perhaps that parents should take more responsibility and not rely on schools so much. However, on balance she believed that the schools should do a lot more towards understanding and communicating with parents.

Several parents stated explicitly that the thing which schools really didn't understand was the importance which Greek parents placed on education, and the need to push students to work as hard as possible. Many other comments seemed to imply this view.

Mothers at one school believed that the fact that the school was employing more Greek teachers and had set up a parents group showed that theywere trying to help Greek students. They thought perhaps that this was the best approach, as it was unrealistic to expect all teachers to really understand the Greek culture.

One father expressed the view very strongly that it was not so much an understanding of the needs of Greek families which was crucial. All students had particular needs which the schools had to consider. What was most important for this parent was a much greater concentration on the teaching of English from an early age. He believed that many of the problems would be overcome if itwas made compulsory for all children to attend kindergartens where the speaking of English was emphasised.

As far as students were concerned, opinions as to how much the school understood their needs as Greek students varied but in general they thought that it depended very much on the teacher. One year 10 girl believed that teachers understood her needs quite well. She compared her experience at her present school with that at a previous private school she had attended, where she felt she was not understood at all. However, several male students at the same school felt that non-Greek teachers did not understand them.

A number of people commented on the importance of having Greek teachers and teacher aides who understood what Greek families thought about education. It was believed that they could provide models for students, help students feel confident about themselves and their background, and facilitate better communication between the school and Greek families.

Preparation for the Future

This is an area where different views might well be related to the curriculum and career orientation programsof particular schools. In fact, some of the comments seem to be dependent on how parents view the school as a whole, but others are relatively consistent across schools.

- Parents at one school said that they were satisfied with the way in which the school prepared children for the future. This view was based on an assessment of the curriculum (they believed that their children were successfully learning maths and English), agreement with the work experience program of the school and the fact that there was a careers teacher in the school.
- The parents of another school were less satisfied. They were concerned about practical matters such as teachers being absent or not very dedi-

cated; the effect of lack of discipline in the school which made learning difficult for their children; lack of resources in the school; inadequate information about how their children were progressing and about the options which they had, and lack of guidance from the teachers. They wanted exact information about their children's capabilities and more suggestions from teachers about alternative directions if the child could not cope with certain work. They saw it as particularly crucial that teachers helped parents and students to make the right choices between subject options.

- In some schools parents had little information about career education programs and did not know whether or not the school had a careers teacher. Careers teachers are clearly a resource for students rather than parents, given the fact that there is only one in each school, but it is probably significant that the majority of parents knew little about careers teachers. Those few who did had mixed opinions. One parent had found the careers teacher very helpful in general discussions about her son and his subject choices, but felt that she did not really have enough information about different occupations. Another parent, who had worked in a school, said that parents were sometimes to blame because they did not turn up to special career information nights.
- Many parents, particularly those who did not have much formal education themselves, were reluctant to comment on the value of various aspects of the curriculum. There were a number of comments about particular subjects such as English, maths and computer studies, but in general, parents felt that they did not have the background to make decisions about whether particular studies were useful preparation for the future of their children. In contrast, parents from the eastern suburban school after some discussion came to the conclusion that a much broader range of subjects should be offered to their children so that all interests could be catered for. They also suggested that, as computers were so widespread in society, it might be an idea to make computer studies compulsory.
- Parents were generally aware of work experience programs and saw them as important. They did however, have some suggestions as to how they could be improved. Parents at one school said they would like to see a more comprehensive program, which allowed students to experience a greater varietyof areas. As it was, it was too selective and didn't show the whole spectrum of jobs which were available. Some thought that young people also needed a variety of excursions and visits to work places so that they finished school with a broad perspective on the world.
- The year 10 students varied considerably in their understanding of the school's program, in their opinions about whether they were being well prepared for the future and in how clear they were about what they might do when they left school. Only one or two students seemed to be committed to a particular occupation; most had thought of a variety of possibilities. About half of them had been on work experience (others were due to go later in the year) and most had found it a useful experience. All students felt that they 'needed to know more' about a variety of jobs. They were generally vague about the actual requirements and training for an occupation. They thought that careers teachers were quite useful for information but (a) 'you have to know what you're interested in' and (b) most information was in pamphlet form and took a bit of searching out.

- Some students were concerned that they weren't getting enough subjects at school which related directly to their interests. This was noticeable with those few students who had set their minds on a particular career. Their interests were directed very much to studies which were clearly relevant to what they wanted to do. On the other hand, several young girls at a relatively academically oriented school commented on what they saw as the general preparation school could offer. They thought that

> ...school helps you to get used to working in a job. The fact that you have to get things in on time and to organise your own work, helps you to prepare for the workforce.

Sources of Information

As expected, the majority of both parents and students saw schools as the most important source of information for decisions about schooling, such as choice of subjects and electives. For decisions about what students do when they leave school, the school is only one place, albeit an important one, to which families look for assistance.

The school

Schools provide both formal information such as reports on students' progress, and much more informal, and even unintended, information such as the subtle (and not so subtle) messages which parents receive at parent/ teacher nights and which students receive in classrooms through their interaction with teachers and other students. Both the formal and the informal contribute to parents' views of their children, and to young people's views of their capabilities and future options.

Parents wanted clear information from schools as to how their children were progressing and some general idea of their capabilities. Many saw this as information which was crucial if they were to help their childrenmake the best decisions. They believed that if their children weren't achieving, often they, the parents, found out about it too late. They wanted to know if their children had a chance of succeeding in academic subjects before decisions had to made about whether, for example, a son should 'take up trade subjects'.

The concern to have accurate information in plenty of time to make decisions was mentioned in a number of contexts. One was the transition from year 10 to year 11. Parents and a number of students were concerned that the differences between year 10 and year 11 were too great. In the junior school, there was not much pressure on students, few formal exams and a relatively relaxed attitude to study. However, in year 11, the demands were much heavier. There was more homework expected, the work was more demanding and testing more formal. Students who mentioned differences between year 10 and year 11 had obviously been surprised by the sudden increase in pressure in year 11.

One consequence of this was that on the basis of reports of their children's progress in the first three years of high school, parents thought that they were sometimes given an unrealistic view of the student's capabilities. They felt very let down when they were told at the end of year 10 that their children were not capable of further academic study.

When parents felt that they did not have a clear idea of how their children were progressing and they had limited knowledge of the education system in general, they often felt very left out of the decisions their children had to make about options at school. A Greek teacher aide mentioned how some parents felt about this. The school advised students, told them how they were going, suggested that they should make certain choices; in fact teachers could be crucial in determining a direction for the student. Parents were unsure about why certain advice was given and sometimes they did not understand the implications of subject choices. Lack of knowledge of the system meant that many parents had to rely on teachers to advise their children correctly. While most parents felt that they had to accept this, some felt unhappy that they could not play a more important part in decisions about some aspects of their children's schooling.

A number of parents stressed the importance of students being carefully directed and guided by teachers according to their abilities. It was difficult for parents to do this because they believed they had a very limited knowledge of educational standards. Several parents thought that if they had some idea of the scores required for various University courses, they would at least have a better idea of whether or not their children were likely to be capable of tertiary study.

The view that parents sometimes put too much reliance on the school was put by a Greek teacher:

> Sometimes, when we explain (aspects of) the system to the parent, they listen, then they say, 'well, you know best' but we don't know best, what is always best for the kid.

Anumber of parents mentioned that they could help their children with information about only a limited range of occupations, and they expected the school to provide information about a range of possibilities based on what the student was capable of. Several mothers said they would like to know about careers for their daughters 'other than the usual, such as secretary and hairdresser'.

Greek teachers were valuable sources of information in some cases. There are obvious differences in the amount of time and effort teachers feel able to put into the job, but it was apparent from the comments of parents that some Greek teachers spend a great deal of time helping parents and children beyond the requirements of a subject teacher. Teacher aides were important referral points for parents; unfortunately, our study did not show whether students referred to them for advice and assistance concerning future planning, in addition to more general help with schooling. A Greek woman who had spent some time as a school librarian said that she 'had a lot of (Greek) kids coming for advice and help' concerning careers.

Friends and relatives

Both parents and students mentioned the importance of friends and relatives for information and advice about future options. The people we spoke with said that they did not look to Greek community networks for information about education and occupational choice. It was generally friends, relatives and fairly close acquaintances who were consulted.

Although only a minority of the students we spoke with had a very clear idea of what they wanted to do after leaving school, several of these students mentioned that the original idea had come from talking to a friend or acquaintance. Older relatives, brothers, sisters and cousins were all useful sources of information. For example, one boy felt that he could go to his brother who was a mechanic for any information about how he might become a mechanic; another boy talked to friends of his mothers who were in his chosen area of interest.

Several young people who had already left school mentioned that relatives and friends were very important for information about education, careers, schooling and job opportunities. They said that cousins and nieces frequently asked them about school matters rather than go to the teachers and careers officers who would be better informed. These young people were seen by younger relatives as the experts because they had been through the experience of deciding on a future direction.

Some parents admitted that they asked older brothers and sisters to talk with younger children about the importance of making the right decisions about schooling, because they were more likely to listen to someone closer in age to them.

Family resources

A number of parents recognised that, although they lacked detailed knowledge of the school system, their own life experiences were an important resource in advising children about the future. In addition, comments from students indicated that some were relying on parents for help. When asked who they would go to for information and help concerning decisions about the future, many mentioned parents. Several agreed that 'parents have been through what we will go through, so they will be able to help.' However, only one of the students we spoke to thought that his parents would be able to help him directly with getting a job. This was because his mother was employed in the area he was interested in, and she had friends in the business too. One other student said quite strongly that because his father was working class, his family 'didn't know people who could help get him a job'.

Parents believed that they were a relatively important influence on what their children wanted for their future. Equally, they believed that the school and television (those 'outside' influences) were important. They felt that they helped their children by offering support and encouragement and by trying to understand them. This they did by talking to them, getting others to talk to them, trying to convince them of the value of education and if possible supporting them financially while they were studying.

Range of Occupations

As indicated above, one of the most clear cut concerns for parents, which children accepted too, was to get out of the labouring and process worker groove which so many of them have been through or are still in. Education is seen as the way out of this. Our discussions suggested that,to some extent, there are still favoured 'desirable' careers for Greek parents (and to a much lesser extent, for young Greek people) such as doctor, lawyer, various paramedical areas, and teacher. The favoured careers are those which were familiar, of high status in Greece and likely to make good money.

However, it is obvious that Greek families are considering a much greater range of occupations now than they were for example, fifteen or twenty years

ago. Whereas previously there was some resistance from Greek families to their children (more correctly their sons) studying in trade areas, TAFE enrolments show that students of Greek background are now certainly entering technical areas of study (TAFE Board, Victoria, 1986). It is now recognised that training in many of these areas can bring financial rewards and status.

Similarly, chosen areas of tertiary study are still somewhat restricted and reflect preferred occupations. One tertiary trained young man said that when he was studying, he could predict that almost every Greek male student would be doing economics. There were areas which were definitely 'out', for example agriculture, which had very few Greek students.

The option of going into business was not mentioned very often by parents. However, there were some comments which indicated that this option was important because it allowed a person to be their own boss, and had the potential to make money. One mother suggested that if her son didn't do very well at school, she would consider helping him go into business for himself, but it was pointed out that this was only an option for families with sufficient money. If there was a family business, it was sometimes expected that the son would eventually take it over.

Thus, parents indicated that whereas in the past, an academic career was the most legitimate path to take, there has been a considerable shift and many more options were now considered. This was partly confirmed by the range of occupations students were considering.

Summary

Greek parents and students from a number of areas in Melbourne took part in the discussions. Parents were very willing to talk about the future of their children and stressed the importance which they placed on education. Although real dissatisfaction and disappointment about their children's education was confined to a very few parents, there were some general concerns expressed by most parents. These centred around discipline in schools, an anxiety about the way in which families would be affected by changing values which were exemplified in the school, the need for more homework and the need for more information about their children's progress at school.

The young people we spoke with were less concerned than their parents about each of these matters. They understood their parents' aspirations for them but sometimes saw their parents' views about life and about school as a 'bit old fashioned'. While most were aware that their parent's views about the future had some influence on them, they believed firmly that it was up to them to make decisions about their life and their future.

The amount of information about careers and future options available to both parents and students varied with the school. Friends, acquaintances and older relatives were frequently used as sources of information about schools and further study.

4. Chinese Families

As outlined in the introductory section of this report, the original intention was to include both ethnic Vietnamese and Chinese families from Vietnam in order to take account of any differences between the educational values and experiences of ethnic Vietnamese and Chinese Vietnamese. As the study progressed, it was decided to include recently arrived Chinese families from other areas because

a) the response from people themselves to being included as Chinese rather than by the country they had come from, was very positive; in most of the groups of Chinese parents, some reference to this was made;

b) the existence of a long-standing Chinese population in Australia may be a factor in making the experience of recently arrived Chinese families potentially different from that of Vietnamese families, therefore there was an argument to include them as aseparate group;

c) it provided an opportunity to increase the range of possible family experiences included in the study.

The Participants

The parents came from Indo-China (Vietnam and Kampuchea), Hong Kong, and mainland China and spoke a number of dialects. They were contacted through five schools covering both inner and outer suburban areas with the help of teacher aides and the bi-lingual interviewer. The Indo-Chinese families lived in two suburbs close to the city and one south-eastern suburb where large numbers of Indo-Chinese people have settled because of proximity to a migrant hostel and manufacturing industries. The mainland Chinese parents lived in a heavily settled industrially based suburb to the east of Melbourne; they came from an area close to the Chinese-Russian border and in the early 1980's were sponsored for settlement in Australia by a church group. Parents from Hong Kong lived in a relatively affluent eastern suburb, which was also a contact point for Greek and English-speaking background families. The longest period of residence in Australia for any of the parents was ten years(a parent from Hong Kong); most had arrived in Australia since 1980. Occupational background of males in the country of origin included mechanic, cameraman, small business owner, food store owner, herbalist, watch repairer, engineer, and electrical engineer. None were working in these areas in Australia; they were employed in semi-skilled jobs or were unemployed, except for the fathers of families from the eastern suburb, who included a number in businesses of their own. Most of the mothers were not employed outside the home. The educational level of parents in the groups ranged from completion of some primary education to a degree, with most having primary education or some secondary education. Students from two high schools (one inner suburban and one eastern suburban) were interviewed. The eastern suburban school group included young people from Malaysia and Hong Kong, as well as Vietnam and Taiwan.

Aspirations and Values Concerning Education

Education was very highly valued by all Chinese parents and a good education for children was considered of fundamental importance. Parents said they wanted to see their children go as far as they could in the educational system and believed that the higher the level reached, the more potential there was for success and satisfaction.

In the traditional Chinese culture, most parents have very high hopes for their children. Parents hope for a child as 'clever as a unicorn' who at school will 'succeed like a dragon'. When a child does well at school, Chinese parents are very proud and feel that it reflects well on them and their family. 'The success of our children can be considered as an honour to our family and our community', one father said.

Parents mentioned a number of positive outcomes which they believed came from a good education. Many of them are summed up in the following statement:

> Good and appropriate education will lead to better success and as a consequence will come a good job, happiness and security.

Several parents mentioned their concern to have children contribute to the society in general. Two fathers from China, both of whom had training in a scientific area, put the need for their children to have a good education in the context of rapid technological developments:

> It is important to complete as much education as possible, because of the importance of technology. Science and technology are changing...and without better education, people will not be able to keep up. We need to provide services to the society.
>
> The world is in progressive evolution and tertiary education is a basic educational level in every developed country... if you don't have a higher education, you are surpassed...and you have difficulty in finding a good job...A higher education is not only useful for the children themselves but it would be useful also for the society.

Finally, parents mentioned the effect of coming to a new country, whether as a refugee or a migrant. Those who had escaped from Indochina and risked their lives doing so, felt strongly that if their children were able to succeed educationally and establish a happy and secure life, what they had been through would be worthwhile. They wished their children to have a better future than they saw for themselves.

Many of the Chinese fathers who were refugees felt that they had lost status in Australia, that they had been 'downgraded'. A few had qualifications which were not recognised, but for most, the feeling came from being unable to practice the skills which they had in their homeland. They were either unemployed or working in areas which they were not used to. Loss of job status since coming to Australia seemed to add to parents' concern to encourage their children to go as far as they could with their education. These parents accepted that they had to work hard and to make sacrifices so their children could get a good education.

The young people we spoke with recognised their parents' ambitions and hopes for them and were certainly aware of the pride parents would feel if they got a 'good job'. In general,they also shared these ambitions for themselves. In the inner city school, several students expressed concern that the curriculum was not academic enough and they would therefore not be able to get the sort of skills they wanted. Some of them felt that their parents did not understand the education system in Australia and how difficult it was to achieve well at school; neither did they feel that their parents really understood the decisions (about curriculum options) which they as students made at school. They generally agreed with their parents' view that it was necessary to work very hard. Most of the students from the eastern suburban school (who it will be recalled came from Hong Kong, Malaysia, Vietnam and Taiwan) were highly motivated, and as a group, they were considering a wide range of possible occupations, including computer programmer (male) and 'something to do with music' (female).

Gender

All of the Chinese parents referred to the fact that in traditional Chinese culture males had been valued much more highly than females, and were given greater educational encouragement and support than girls. In fact, the formal education of girls was not considered important. However, both mothers and fathers thought that this had changed a lot, both in the countries which they came from and amongst Chinese families in Australia. The consensus was that parents made few distinctions now between sons and daughters in terms of their education. The parents who participated in the discussions believed that they gave equal encouragement to all of their children.

It is difficult to add anything about the issue of gender from the discussion with students. Males and females varied in their occupational interests and in their apparent interest in education. The girls we spoke with thought that they were given equal encouragement to boys to complete their education. One young woman from the inner suburban school said that her high aspirations had partly come from the encouragement and support which her father had given her. Although he had had little formal education himself, he helped her whenever he could; she could communicate well with him and she believed that she benefited from her father's attitude.

However, in discussions with individuals working in the areas of education and welfare, several women mentioned that although social changes and migration had brought changes to Chinese families and their views of women's education, the influence of traditional values was still very strong in many families. Our discussions with families did not explore allocation of domestic tasks, differences between social expectations on girls and boys or many of the other factors which have been shown to influence educational and occupational outcomes for girls. They were concerned with the general aspirations which parents expressed for daughtersand sons.

'But the children's ability is the key element'

Although parents had high aspirations and hopes for their children and would dearly love them to achieve educationally, for the sake of both the son or daughter and the family, there was a clear recognition that the ability of their sons and daughters, as well as their willingness to work, were decisive if children were going to achieve.

> The key element is not the wish, the expectation or the thinking of the parents, but the ability of the children. If the children do not have the ability to go further, then our willing (it) will not be realised.
>
> Every parent, whatever they are, Chinese, Australian or other, likes to see their

> children getting a top job...but these willings are not the most important thing... the ability of the children is.

Parents recognised that there were differences between themselves and their children as far as attitudes to school were concerned. Their children tended to be more relaxed about schooling and less committed to hard work than they, the parents, might want. One father said that everyone used to push their children to work hard in order to achieve well, but usually 'the youth have their own opinions'. One parent thought that young people liked an 'easy life and no hard work'. Most parents thought that this was because their children were still young, not yet mature and didn't have very definite plans for the future. They believed that as children grew older, they would change their attitudes and any gap between them and their children would 'close little by little as (the children) get older'. However, there was a recognition from some parents that their children's values were becoming different from their own in a number of respects. One mother said that her son was obviously questioning the parent's values by asking, 'why (do you) always like us to study hard, to have more homework, to be respectful towards elders?'

Two fathers with tertiary education felt that there were no differences between themselves and their children as far as recognising the importance of education was concerned. However, while they believed that their children agreed that getting an education in a new country was important, the parents felt it was important not to put too heavy a pressure on their children as they would possibly turn away from education.

The Importance of English Language Skills

Many parents believed that the most fundamental problem which young Chinese people faced in planning for their future was gaining facility with the English language (this was not a major issue for the parents from Hong Kong, who were more familiar with the English language).

Parents were concerned that inadequate English was going to restrict their children's chances, not only in school, but in gaining access to higher education. For some parents, their strong feelings about this matter grow directly out of their own experience of having a high level of skills and quite often more than one language, yet the lack of good English means that they cannot use their skills. One father saw this as a 'waste of resources'. Children, he thought, must be able to develop good English skills, in order that the whole range of jobs is open to them. Sometimes they were able to get through the first years of secondary school, but as they reached the higher levels it was more and more important to have good English skills, particularly because there was more reading to be done.

Without opportunities to learn English, parents were concerned that their children were not able to develop their full abilities. As one mother put it:

> Australia is very good in the educational services. Schools in Australia provide what my children need for their future, but...can they receive everything that is taught to them? The acceptance of what is taught depends on mastering English. Schools must provide more opportunity to the ethnic student with English difficulty to learn the language either insmall groups or individually.

Several parents felt that they had done their duty as parents by advising their children to work hard and giving them every support they could. But they asked how this advice and support could help their children achieve more if they lacked knowledge of English? As naturalised Australian citizens, they expected the government to try to prevent or cure the disadvantage which their children faced as teenage newcomers to Australia.

Parents agreed that when children arrived in Australia at a relatively young age or at a primary school age, although they had many difficulties and adjustments to make, they could generally catch up to the average after some years. It was when they arrived as teenagers that they experienced real problems. One father talked about his daughter:

> My daughter is 19 years of age now. We came to Australia three years ago after having stayed three years in Hong Kong refugee camps. While in Vietnam, she had no English at all, and coming here, she was immediately put into year 10 after a short period in a language centre. How can she cope with her class? I don't know but I think it is unfair and not appropriate to educate newly arriving teenagers in such a method. Too many problems and difficulties in schooling can lead to boredom and a disinterested attitude.

Another parent mentioned the difficulties his children had had because of their disrupted and interrupted education as teenage Kampuchean refugees. This meant that they were really struggling in high school.

Students too were concerned about acquiring good English language skills, particularly those students who had not been in Australia for very long and who thought that their English was not very good. At the time when we were-speaking with students, there was some talk of altering the requirements for students to sit for English as a Second Language at HSC (VCE) level. Students and parents were very concerned about the proposed changes and thought that some students would be severely disadvantaged if they had to sit the straight English Expression exam. Several students made the point that even though their spoken English was good enough, they still had a lot of trouble with written English.

According to some students, as with some other NESB groups, the disadvantage suffered by not being familiar with English is one factor which tends to lead to some students putting a great deal of effort into science and maths subjects. Several students we spoke with were planning careers in the maths/science area. One male had his sights set on a job with computers; two females planned to go into areas based on high marks in the maths/science area, medicine and accountancy. However, it is not certain to what extent their present plans for the future were being influenced by concerns about their English language skills.

Schools and Preparation for the Future

The Chinese parents in the discussion groups were reluctant to criticise the education system which is helping to prepare their children for the future. They admitted that the education system which they went through was very different in many ways from that which their children were experiencing. But in general (and apart from the comments noted above) they did not like to be very negative. They felt that they must accept that schools are different inAustralia. The parents who were most questioning and who were more prepared to be forthright in their statements were those from Hong Kong. These parents were more familiar with the English education system from their own experience of it.

There were however, aspects of schools which Chinese parents did comment on. Some parents were concerned to make it clear that overall they were happy with the schooling which their children were receiving but there were aspects which theythought could be improved and which would help their children in planning and preparing for the future. One of these, the need for more opportunities for students to improve their English, has already been mentioned.

Discipline

Chinese parents believe that a strict school discipline is always important. In general they think that Australian schools give too much freedom to children. This view was expressed by parents in all groups, irrespective of their country of origin. The concern with discipline was related to the need for children to have a moral as well as an academic education; to be taught good behaviour and respect for older people. Parents were concerned at the relaxed attitude of teachers to students, the way students were allowed to dress at school (one parent said that some students dressed as if they were going to a 'dancing party'), and the general behaviour of students in the school grounds and in the street.

The students we spoke with recognised that their parents were concerned about school discipline, but in general they were happy with the relaxed atmosphere of school and felt that it had more advantages than disadvantages. One student mentioned particularly that she appreciated being able to debate issues at school. However, there were some concerns about discipline. Students made distinctions between teachers who could control classes and those who couldn't and they were somewhat resentful of the latter because it was difficult to work in their classes.

In the general context of inadequate discipline, parents also mentioned the need for uniforms. In the opinion of a number of parents, uniforms 'represent the appearance of the school' and can make it less easy for students to miss classes and school. Students did not seem to be concerned about uniforms.

Homework

Insufficient written homework was another aspect of schooling which parents commented on. Written homework to practice and polish what has been learnt at school was seen as part of a good education. In addition, parents mentioned that the small amount of written homework meant that children had too much free time at home which was often spent watching television. A parent speculated that teachers were 'doing it this way because that is how they were taught; they can only provide what they know and have had themselves, without thinking about any improvement'.

Peer group pressure

Several parents mentioned pressure from the age peer group which tended to influence their children away from traditional family values and good work habits. One parent gave an illustration:

> School kids here, when they are teenagers, are usually taught by the peer group to smoke. If they don't want to take the cigarette...they are laughed at by the surrounding kids. Students are not allowed to smoke in China. Not only a teacher has

> the duty to correct a smoker student, but the parent and the community too.

However, one parent from Hong Kong thought that even though peer group pressure was a concern, it could not be used as an excuse. She said:

> You can't blame the peer group pressure because as an old Cantonese adage says, 'If the bull didn't want to drink water, you would not be able to pull its head down'.

Understanding Chinese family needs

Most parents felt that teachers in their children's schools did not really understand what Chinese families wanted for their children, nor did they understand the needs of Chinese students, because of the difference in cultural values and expectations. It was explained that Chinese parents need to have their children gain a moral education as well as an academic one and this constituted a major difference between the Chinese system and the Australian one. Young people needed to have values of hard work and commitment instilled in them. A dilemma mentioned by one parent was that teachers usually advised parents to encourage English speaking at home in order to improve the child's English, whereas parents were concerned to have children maintain the mother tongue and home was the only place where this could be practiced.

Parents recognised that teachers varied, some being very helpful and kind, others being somewhat discriminatory. The views of students confirmed this. The feeling was also expressed by some parents that perhaps complete understanding is an unreal expectation, given the differences between the two cultures.

In summary, Chinese parents said that they were relatively satisfied with the academic side of the education system and the way in which it prepared students for the future. There were major concerns from parents about opportunities for students to increase their English language facility. This they felt was a great disadvantage which their children faced and which meant that they were often unable to achieve as well as they might. The aspects of the education system which they would like to see improved were more attention to discipline, to homework, to uniforms and to an overall moral education. The view of a number of parents is summed up by the following comment:

> The sort of education provided is good but the way of provision, I think, is not quite perfect. Kids in primary schools and in junior secondary schools usually have too much free time and very few homeworks but they have an overload of school work at the later years of the secondary school.

Making Decisions

Traditionally, Chinese parents play a significant part in helping their children decide about future directions, and it is a source of concern and disappointment that they feel they always cannot do so in Australia. As one mother from Hong Kong said:

> In Asia, parents always help children to make decisions for the future by choosing a career for them and encouraging and inciting them to decide upon an academic choice in order to get the chosen career. Here (in Australia) the willingness and the decision of the students and their family are not a decisive element. An entry into a

> tertiary institution depends on the marks obtained and challenged by the number of applicants. You are asked to make a decision, but (when the) decision (is) made, you are not always successful to reach to get what you have decided.

In order to adequately help their children in making decisions about the future, parents said that they needed both information and understanding about the educational system. Most parents felt that they had little of either. They relied on the school to provide their children with the necessary information about subject choice and different careers. They felt strongly that they would very much like to be able to help their children more, but their difficulties with English and the lack of appropriate materials in their own language, made it impossible. A number said that they were interested in attending more school functions and would like more information, but they were only happy about going when they knew that qualified interpreters and translators would be present.

Most of the parents in the groups knew little of information about occupations and further education which the schools provided for their children and they said that they had not received any personally from the school. Their own information came from friends and informal community networks, although a number of parents said that often they found that members of their community were no more well informed than they themselves were. Many parents were aware of the general level of HSC marks which was required for particular tertiary courses.

Comments from some students indicated that they really needed and wanted 'a bit of support and guidance from both teachers and parents in choosing the right subjects at the right time'. While parents, because of their lack of knowledge of the system, rely on the school to supply information and assistance, some students would obviously appreciate more help from both quarters. The same students mentioned specifically the need for more help from teachers in the junior secondary years so that they select the right subjects, and more attention from careers teachers over a longer period of time while they are deciding about their future. Even those students who had a reasonably clear idea of what they wanted to do, believed that they didn't know much about the job, and were anxious to get more information.

Ethnic associations which have broad political and/or welfare aims, were specifically mentioned by several parents as not very useful sources of information about school and employment matters (ethnic community welfare organisations are also a source of information about educational matters, although they did not seem to be important for the parents we spoke to).

Parents felt that the greatest help they could offer their sons and daughters in planning for the future was to instill in them the value of hard work and to encourage them in any way possible to continue with their studies because 'the harvest of their hard work belongs to them'. Apart from the parents from Hong Kong who had a greater familiarity with English, and the tertiary trained parents, they felt inadequate in offering any more detailed help.

Parents talked to children, advised them about what they should do in the future, tried to give them an orientation towards success in school. Occasionally they pointed to examples of young people who had been successful. There is a reluctance to have friends or other community members talk to their children as they generally do not like to disclose their family affairs to people outside the extended family. Students tended to talk with friends and brothers and sisters about what they planned to do.

The students we spoke to, who came from an inner city and an eastern suburban school, varied as to how far their planning for an after school future had gone. One young woman had clearly considered a number of factors:

> I will pick something I know I'm good at. Maybe an accountant because I know I'm good at maths. Something I know I will really try hard at because I like it. I'm not going to do something I'm not interested in because it's mainly interest and what you think you'll do well at...

The comment clearly illustrates the confidence which comes from knowing that you are 'good at' something at school.

Summary

Chinese parents and young people from a variety of different areas showed a consistent belief in the importance of education, and consistent high aspirations for children. However, the markedly different experiences of those who came from Kampuchea and Vietnam as refugees and those who came as migrants from Hong Kong and Malaysia meant that parents had different critical concerns about the future of their children.

For example, some of those who came as refugees were concerned that schools were not equipped to cope with teenagers who had interrupted schooling, and little or no English language background. They were deeply concerned about their children attaining a secure position with some status, particularly where parents felt that they had lost status through coming to Australia and not being able to practice their own skills. They also felt somewhat unable to help their children because of the language difficulties. The type of support which some educated parents were used to giving their children was no longer enough to ensure their success. Greater familiarity with both the English language and to some extent the Australian education system, as well as a background which was not disrupted by war, meant that the concerns of families from Hong Kong were about aspects of schooling such as peer group pressure, the curriculum and study options. Discipline was however, a common concern.

5. Turkish Families

The majority of Turkish people migrating from mainland Turkey to Australia arrived during the first half of the 1970's. Most of those who arrived during that time were assisted migrants and came in under the category of 'unskilled' workers (Young, Petty and Faulkner, 1980:82-83). This reflected the fact that they were predominantly originally from rural areas and had limited formal education. Elley points out however that Turkish migrants were generally better educated and more urbanised than their counterparts in Turkey (Elley, 1985:130). For many, the process of seeking greater financial security and a better future began by moving from the Turkish countryside to urban areas. Coming to Australia was a consolidation of this shift. They came with high hopes and limited information about the country, seeking a better life for themselves and their children, and often intending to remain only for a short period. After 1980, there was a higher proportion of more educated Turkish migrants arriving, largely as a result of political and economic developments in Turkey. These people were more urbanised than the earlier arrivals (Elley, 1985:130).

The Participants

We spoke with families from six suburbs, one western, one inner city, two to the north-east of Melbourne and two to the south-east, the latter being close to a migrant hostel, which was the first point of residence for some families. The suburbs covered all but one of the main areas in Melbourne where Turkish people have settled in greatest numbers. Only one group of families was contacted through the local school; other groups were contacted through community organisations and individuals working in education and welfare areas. Because of this, families in each group tended to know each other and, in some cases, have fairly regular contact. Five of the groups were mixed (males and females); one was all female. All of the mixed groups included some teenage children. In addition, students from three high schools and one tertiary institution were interviewed. The majority of parents had some primary school education; a few had secondary education and two males were tertiary trained. Discussions were also held with a number of Turkish community workers and other professionals.

Aspirations and Values Concerning Education

All of the Turkish parents had high aspirations for their sons and most, for their daughters. There were many strong statements that the education of children and hopes for their future were important reasons why people migrated to Australia. As one community worker, herself a parent, said:

> In Turkey, education is the means of escape from low pay, bad jobs and lack of respect. This is what (people) come (to Australia) to escape from.

Her comment reflects the two main reasons which parents mentioned for their concern with their children's education. They were social reasons, such as having a son or daughter who is 'recognisable and respected in the Turkish community', and economic, the overwhelming desire to have children 'escape the factory floor'. The all female group believed that someone who was educated would have a better life and earn more money. Because of this they urged their children, both sons and daughters, to study as much as they could. They felt that if children did not study and had to leave school early, they would 'end up in factories, working for 10 or 20 years and then spend the rest of their time going to doctors seeking medical help.'

Because the education of children is so important, parents are prepared to put a lot of effort and resources into getting what they believe is the best possible education. They encouraged and tried to help their children by providing whatever they could in the way of learning materials such as books, and encyclopedias. Some parents who have had little formal education themselves put great faith in such support, believing that if children read and absorbed much of the material, they could not fail to do well. Private tutors were considered by some parents.

The extent to which high aspirations become unrealistic pressure on children will vary tremendously. Some of the factors which may affect this are the student's ability, the nature of their school experience, the personality of the parents and how they convey their aspirations, even the number of children in the family and whether there is more than one child to carry the aspirations of the parents. There were parents who said that under no circumstances should they push their children to be what they wanted them to be. It was up to a son or daughter to decide, although it would be much better if this decision was acceptable to parents. On the other hand, there were parents who, feeling that their own chances for success had passed, were pinning all their hopes on their children. One example was the father who said that there were 'no chances left' for his wife and himself, therefore it was important for his daughter to do well. He had words with his daughter when she came home with a report which had good marks for all subjects but physical education. He could not see any reason for his daughter not succeeding in school well enough to go to University. He had provided her with a good home, good food, support, a good school, books (new, not second hand) and was prepared to seek any assistance and information she needed. All his daughter needed to do was to work hard.

Mothers in the all female group thought that mothers were generally more tolerant and understanding of children's problems at school and believed that it was not very effective to push children into something they didn't want to do. At the same time they felt that they had to support and influence their children because they were still too young to make up their minds by themselves. They agreed that encouragement was a must for their children, who were 'in between two cultures' and believed that it was very important to talk with children, be aware of their capabilities and encourage them if they showed an interest in a particular field.

The comments of students indicated that most were either relying on luck or trying by self motivation to live up to their parents' aspirations for them.

Students at year 10 were certainly aware of their parents' aspirations for them. They believed that this was because their parents had not had opportunities themselves, and therefore wanted their children to succeed where they had not been able to. A number of students thought parents wanted them to have a 'respectable job which they could boast about to their friends.' Although year 10 students generally did not have a very clear idea of what they might do after leaving school, they seemed to share their parents' concern about getting a good education. They talked about the quality of education in their school and how that might affect their futures. One group believed that their school was seen as a 'migrant' school, that it did not have a very good reputation academically and that it would not be easy for them to get good results.

A group of year 12 students we spoke with said that their parents wanted them to finish year 12 and if possible go on to Melbourne University. Parents had not specified any particular career but they were satisfied with what the students wanted to do. All of the students felt that to some extent they had been conditioned by what their parents wanted, by initially thinking of careers like doctor and lawyer. However, they realised by the time they reached the end of year 10, that that was only possible for students who could handle the required subjects. They saw school as relatively easy up until year 10, but after that it was necessary to work very hard to succeed. They were prepared to do this to achieve what they wanted, and at the same time try to fulfil their parent's high hopes for them. One male student said:

> I know my parents have high expectations for me. I'll try not to disappoint them.

In talking about the differences between themselves and their parents, these students mentioned that one benefit they thought would come with a profession was that it would help them to act more freely within the Turkish community. Female students particularly were concerned about the importance which was placed on gossip, and the spread of information through the relatively small Turkish community if they stepped beyond the accepted norms of behaviour. They felt that their parents were strict with them, that they had to watch what they were doing and to behave well within the community. A profession would bring not only status within the community but would allow them greater freedom of action.

The young people who had already been through school and had been accepted into a tertiary course had a number of things to say about how their parent's attitudes affected the decisions which they had made. Some students talked about the general urging and encouragement to stay until the end of year 12.

> I wanted to quit at the end of year 11. I'd had enough of school. I wanted to take a year's break and then come back to HSC if I wanted to. But I was pressured into staying on at least until the end of year 12. Once I finished year 12, this (getting into the course) just happened. (female tertiary student)
>
> My parents just wanted me to be at school for as long as I possibly could. I enjoyed school, but because my parents really wanted me to, I thought OK, I can put up with it... Even though they wanted me to study, I could have left any time I wanted to. But once you can't find a job, or the only job you can find is a secretarial one...I just didn't want to be a secretary, so I thought I'd go back to school (that is, college). (female tertiary student)

However, these students also thought that there were other parents who took a much less strong view about completing secondary education.

> All the parents I know, family friends, the only thing they say is "don't work in a factory...get yourself a better job, better working conditions and if you can achieve

> that by studying, then by all means study". (female tertiary student)

A male student added, 'That's the only encouragement they give you. They don't say do this, do that'.

However, some students had another perspective. They suggested that some parents, disillusioned by the system, have learned to put little faith in schooling. One student talked about his own family, and other Turkish parents he knew:

> I've noticed that Turkish parents think their kids won't make it into tertiary education, so they encourage them to look for a job rather than work their hardest. They see that in the past, many students have gone through secondary education and they haven't made it, they've usually dropped out at year 9 or 10 or 11 so they say, 'well look, no one's making it, so I doubt if they'll make it, so we might as well get them out and put them into some factory where they can work rather than spend another few years at school and end up in the same place anyway.' It was like that in my family especially with my brother who is older. He didn't really want to continue his schooling so my parents didn't encourage him. They said why waste another few years at school, and I can see the same thing happening now with kids at school.

A female student added:

> My brother's 15 and he tends not to like school and he hardly ever does any homework...and the only answer my parents have to him is, 'if you don't like study, just quit school and start working, don't waste your time', so they are not exactly pushing him to stay at school, but they won't stop him if he wants to.

Another student made a distinction between two attitudes of parents:

> There's the one lot (of parents) who say study, study, study, so you're not (don't become) a worker. And the others say 'you can speak English, that's enough advantage for you, now find a good job' and they think you should be able to.

To summarise, the parents we spoke with valued education highly and generally encouraged their children to stay at school for as long as possible, hoping they would be able to achieve a well paid and respected job at the end of it. There was the suggestion that some parents are less committed to encouraging their children to stay on as they do not believe their children will succeed in the schools. The students we spoke with shared in general terms the aspirations which their parents had for them, did not want to disappoint their parents, and over the years of their secondary schooling, began to take a fairly realistic view of what they thought they would be able to achieve.

Gender

The parents we spoke with were, by participating in the discussion, indicating that they were both interested in, and concerned about their children's education and this tended to be similar for both their sons and their daughters. In addition, most of the female secondary and tertiary students we spoke with had career aspirations and support from their families for these aspirations. Therefore, it is not surprising that we did not speak to any parents who held the view that schooling was not necessary for girls, or who prevented their daughters from going to school, for whatever reason.

The issue of educational disadvantage of Turkish girls through absence from school has been raised a number of times in the past and continues to be discussed. A recent issue of the 'Turkish Gazette' (25/7/87:5) quoted a teacher aide from the northern suburbs as saying that the majority of the students of Turkish background who play truant regularly are girls aged between 9 and 14 years. During our discussions, a number of people either mentioned it as a matter of general concern or gave specific examples of parents who had restricted the education of their daughters. However, while the 'truth' may be difficult to determine, there are some indications that the case has been overstated. A study carried out in 1985 concluded that ...'there are grounds for assertion that, however much this (the non-attendance of Turkish girls) may have occurred in the past, it is now not widespread' (Brookes, 1985:96). Elley (1985:176) found that her Turkish informants were very critical of Turkish parents whose daughters left school before they were 15. Non-attendance was sometimes associated with an imminent return to Turkey. With the above in mind, we can look at comments which were made in the discussion groups and interviews.

Firstly, both parents and young people in the group discussions indicated that although there were different expectations about the general behaviour of males and females, and that females were more restricted in their contact with the world outside the family, they were encouraged equally to do well educationally. Parents said that they did not discriminate and would support their daughters as far as they wanted to go. Female students were planning futures based on tertiary education. A number of parents specifically mentioned that they were opposed to early marriage and wanted their daughters to continue studying.

Parents mentioned a number of reasons why they regarded girls' education as important. For example, one mother thought that if daughters were not educated properly, they would not be able to help their children; a father was concerned to see that his daughter could support herself and be independent. Several parents said that it was important for them to have their daughters as well as their sons in a respectable job which was recognised by the community. They implied that it reflected well on them. In general, education was seen as prestigious and bringing increased status to the family. Turkish women from a rural background recognise that a daughter can obtain substantial benefits for herself and for her family through educational opportunities and they are ready to support their daughters as much as they can (Keceli, 1986:52).

Individual parents sometimes encouraged their daughters in the face of criticism from friends and neighbours. A young woman, now in a professional position, said that she now appreciates and understands the pressures and anxieties her family must have gone through in encouraging her and allowing her to continue with her education to tertiary level. With little formal education themselves, they had to cope with neighbours asking why they should bother to educate their daughter, and weigh up whether they were doing the right thing. They also had to live with the fear that their daughter would be led astray and bring shame and embarrassment on the family. In addition, there is the general anxiety that a child's increasing dominance in English could mean the loss of Turkish identity and the adoption of values different from those of the family. Parents have to weigh up their aspirations and their fears concerning children's education.

The young woman mentioned above recognised that, whatever she did, she had to be a 'good Turkish girl' in a situation which was very different from her home life, with different values and ways of behaving. In fact, she saw this as the key. Her parents were prepared to support her and they were happy for her to do many things which they were not familiar with, as long as she stayed a good Turkish girl, that is, she accepted and lived by important family and traditional values. The importance of staying within family values was echoed by female students at high school.

So, parents believed that they did not discourage their daughters from studying, and female students believed that they were generally encouraged to achieve at school. However, young women were very aware of the strong social restrictions which they are expected to operate within.

In contrast to the above views, some of the individuals we spoke with pointed out that the decision making process about a daughter's future was often very different from that concerning a son's future. There were still great barriers placed in the way of girls' education in some families, particularly where the father dominated the family. There is much gossiping about children and it is very easy to become the subject of this gossip. Concern about a daughter's reputation can be a justification for restricting her educational opportunities.

One woman gave the example of a female high school student who had good HSC marks and wanted to do a tertiary course. Despite the efforts of the high school principal, a member of the tertiary institution and a teacher aide, the father was determined to go ahead with his plan to marry his daughter to a man the girl barely knew and who was certainly not her match educationally. The father took the girl with him constantly to interpret for him, but would not agree to further education for her.

More generally, several women mentioned their concern about the effect on girls' education and post-school futures of an increasing trend towards more traditional Islamic values and attitudes towards women. One community worker felt that there was now considerable pressure on women to adopt traditional customs and to give up some of the changes which in part have allowed them a greater say in public life. This may have an effect on the social conditions for girls' schooling and on the decisions which they make concerning future directions.

One further comment concerning the effect of gender was made by a male professional who suggested that the more restricted public life of females explained why they tended to do better at HSC level (both in languages and in maths and science) than Turkish males. He attributed this to the fact that girls tend to stay at home more and study, the study habits of girls are subject to more control by parents, and they are generally more disciplined than Turkish boys of the same age.

'They could go a lot further if they got support from the school'

The parents we spoke with had many critical comments to make about the school system which their children were in. Some parents were mildly dissatisfied; others were painfully disillusioned. Behind all of the comments was a concern that the aspirations which they had for their children were, in a significant number of cases, not being met or they saw little hope of them being met in the future.

At the most general level, parents thought that many of their children were capable of doing much better and were not being given the opportunity to do so. The reasons they offered for this were twofold; various aspects of the school system, and their own inability to help because of language difficulties and lack of information. In addition, some parents thought that the general standard of schools in areas of high migrant population was fairly low and no matter how intelligent their children were, it was difficult to achieve a high academic level. Those factors which relate to the schools are outlined in this section; parents lack of information is discussed in the following section.

When children are unsuccessful, or do not come up to the expectations of the parents, parents see themselves as failures, and feel that the sacrifice of migration has not had many rewards. The hopes which some parents have for their children's success are very strongly felt, and children's lack of success evokes equally strong feelings of anger and disillusionment. One mother said with some emphasis:

> It's a waste of my time if my children don't skip the working class'...

She commented not only on her own experience, but that of many Turkish parents who had seen their children fail at school. It was, she said, part of the way in which the system operated to keep working class families 'at the same level'. Education was seen as the key to moving out of the working class and away from the factory floor.

It was pointed out that this disillusionment can have a number of direct and indirect effects on children's education. One effect has already been mentioned. It is that some parents believe that many Turkish children are not doing well at school because of a system which fails to recognise their particular problems and does not provide them with opportunities to succeed. They conclude that the chances of success for their **own** children are very small, and therefore do not, or don't know how to, encourage their children to stay on and study harder.

Other parents, seeing that their children are not doing well and that they themselves are having to work long hours in a factory, are disillusioned and talk of going back to Turkey. This in turn has a de-stabilising effect on the children who tend not to apply themselves at school so much if they know that their parents are considering going back to Turkey.

The parents we spoke with, believe that there are a number of factors which either contribute directly to their children experiencing difficulty at school, or are not part of the sort of education they want for their children. These are outlined below.

Lack of discipline

Parents in each of the groups were concerned in one way or another with what they believed was a lack of discipline in schools. They believed that the relaxed attitude of schools to children's behaviour contributed to young people's poor performance. Some parents were particularly upset because children are taught discipline and respect at home, but the school does not support this teaching. The views of many parents are summed up in the comment that

> schools do not equip students with social discipline and students are failing to be successful in school and thus in society.

Parents who had the money often chose to send their children to a non-government school because of what they believed were severe discipline problems in government schools.

Many parents thought that there was a direct relationship between teachers being too casual and students not being very interested in work that is academically challenging. They felt that teachers had a casual attitude towards teaching because of lack of pressure (from the government) and a negative attitude towards the students, such as 'well, I'm doing my job, it's not up to me to push them any harder.' In addition, one group of parents thought that:

> Good trained teachers tend to go and teach in better schools. Teachers who are not so successful go to areas where a high concentration of non-English speaking people are living.

Some other parents thought that the best teachers went to private schools.

Several groups commented on teachers' dress as an example of a too relaxed attitude. They thought that it was important for teachers to be good models for students, and as they didn't present themselves very well, they did not gain the respect of students or parents.

The students we spoke with did not have such negative attitudes towards their schools or their teachers and they generally made clear distinctions between teachers who were helpful and concerned and those who were not. Their comments will be outlined more fully in a later section, but in general they liked and found most helpful those teachers who showed an interest in their work, who were 'well disciplined ' and who 'managed their classrooms well'.

Lack of a uniform at most schools and too little homework added to parents' concerns about education and the preparation which their children were getting for the future. Uniforms were generally seen to help discipline, and as one father said:

> Seeing young girls dress up in colourful clothes was just not right for the students of today and the adults of tomorrow.

In Turkey, from the beginning of primary school, there is homework. Children work hard right through to the end of secondary school. Home work is considered very important and is tangible evidence that a student is working. Most parents wanted more homework and more policing of homework by teachers. Some believed that homework kept children busy after school; as it was they had too much time to 'do nothing'.

Comments about homework and a too relaxed attitude in schools were often linked to the difference between years 7-10 and years 11-12. One mother expressed very strongly that the main problem, one which 'affects the whole family', is that students are not pressured enough in the early years of high school. When they go into year 11 and have to work much harder, they are surprised and discouraged, so want to give up study and leave school. Other parents felt that because they did not understand the system, they were misled into believing that their children were performing quite well. They don't put much pressure on children because they don't realise that their children are unsuccessful until they reach the senior high school years and receive poor results. When the parents confront the teachers, they are told that their child does not have the capacity for higher levels of work. One frustrated parent said: 'Why don't they say this from the beginning so I can help my son?'

The curriculum

Comments on the curriculum centred around two main points, the need for more emphasis on moral education, and too little emphasis on academic subjects.

As indicated above, parents were concerned that schools did not teach children disciplined behaviour; there seemed to them to be no emphasis on respect for older people. One parent thought children were being brought up as 'uncivilised'. As children spend as much if not more time at school than with their parents, it must be the duty of the school to discipline the mind and to teach moral behaviour. Some parents suggested specific subjects; others thought it should be part of the general policy of the school.

A number of parents thought that schools did not put much emphasis on academic subjects and therefore students were not interested in them. The result was that young people's chances of going to a University were greatly reduced. Others thought their children were not being 'educated properly', that they were lacking in a 'strong base of knowledge' which would equip them throughout their lives whether they were academically successful or not. They believed this was because students spend too much time on less important subjects like 'painting and colouring pictures and games'. One mother was scornful of schools which taught subjects like cooking: 'You don't have to go to school to learn to cook. I can teach (my daughter) to cook at home'.

On the other hand, University High School was favoured because it was believed that there was a strong emphasis on academic curriculum there. The daughter of a family who lived outside University High School catchment area, had sat for and passed the entrance exam for the school. Her father said that if she had not passed he would have 'had the for sale notices out on his house' and the family would have moved into the area.

Parents made the above comments about curriculum, but at the same time, many said that they knew little about the school's curriculum and did not feel confident in turning up to meetings at the school which were called to discuss such issues.

A few students thought that they did not have enough challenging subjects. For example, one student at a high school was unhappy with the education he was getting because although he was learning the 'basic things', he had never got into 'complex subjects' like languages. In general, this student thought that he was not being given enough choice about the subjects he was able to do at school. Students at another school believed that they suffered because their school did not provide the sort of subjects which would help them succeed academically.

Lack of encouragement

Some parents thought that together with the factors mentioned above, the fact that their sons and daughters did not receive positive encouragement from teachers contributed to their lack of success at school and limited their options for the future. One parent was convinced that the reason her daughter had left school was because the daughter was 'constantly told that she would be unsuccessful in doing a higher level'.

A number of tertiary students recalled that they had to have a strong belief in themselves, because their teachers did not always have that belief. They were referring to experiences of approximately five years ago.

> In high school you get put down by some teachers where you know you can be in the top third of the class. One teacher will turn around and say, look because English is your second language, (whereas English is my first and Turkish is my second) teachers will turn around and say, you are having problems, whereas you know the Australian born is having similar problems or worse, and she will degrade you and not say anything to the others. When you come across things like that, it makes you think, it's them or you. (female student)

> My English teachers in years 11 and 12 were saying that because English was my second language (whereas it wasn't) that I didn't have a great chance of succeeding and they used to tell me that I should concentrate more on the science and maths subjects instead of humanities. They didn't really offer me any help, they just said that this is what you are....and English isn't your first language, so you might as well drop it as you don't have the potential to improve. They didn't say this directly but that was the message that was coming across to me.... With my friends who were Greek and Italian they didn't say that to them. (male student)

On the other hand, the group of current year 12 students pointed out that they were quite happy with the encouragement they got from teachers and one of the things they appreciated about the school was the way teachers emphasised success, gave them the opportunity to work hard to achieve their aims and expected students to perform to the best of their ability. Several parents also mentioned that individual teachers were very helpful and encouraging.

Lack of understanding

In addition to the dissatisfactions which parents (and some students) felt about school and which they thought made it more difficult for students to achieve success, there was a general feeling that schools did not understand Turkish families, and Turkish parents understood little about the education system. The comments about this varied.

Some parents and students thought that one could not really expect schools to have a good understanding of Turkish families or to know very much about other cultures. However, they did expect teachers to be sensitive to their cultural background, to be understanding of students' needs, recognise their difficulties and encourage and challenge them. One group of students thought that actual knowledge of different cultures was not the main point; encouragement and understanding was.

The all female group thought that students would be helped by a more co-operative relationship between schools and parents. These mothers said that it was sometimes difficult to communicate with teenage children, particularly because they spend so much of their time at school in an environment which is very different from home. Teachers should have a better knowledge of each child's problems and notify and consult with parents when necessary.

Discussions with students revealed significant differences between schools. Several tertiary students had attended schools where there were a large number of Turkish students, a Turkish teacher aide and community language classes. As one student put it, 'we had everything...' and the experience had obviously been quite positive. Other Turkish students had been one of very few in their schools and had felt that the understanding they received was minimal. The presence of Turkish teachers was significant for some students and not for others. For example, one student said that the fact of having a Turkish teacher in the school was 'very important for me, even though I didn't like him as a person'. On the other hand, the year 12 students believed that their non-Turkish teachers encouraged and supported them sufficiently, even if they didn't understand them as young people of Turkish background.

A few parents we spoke to were angry and disillusioned about the general lack of understanding because they believe that they and their children would be the ultimate losers. One father spoke of his real pain because his 'dreams for his sons were not fulfilled'. Because of the failure of the school to provide a good education for his children, and because of his own lack of understanding of the system, three of his sons had left school at an early stage and ended up 'on the floors'.

Another father was very angry because of the experiences he had had with his son's schooling. At his first high school, the son was unhappy because he was constantly picked on and later involved in a fight; according to the father, the principal of the school refused to sign transfer papers to change his son to another school; after a period away from school, the son went to a technical school, where he was not happy and which the father referred to as a 'bludger, undisciplined' school. All attempts to get the son into another high school seemed to have failed and the father thought that the principal of one high school was 'trying to push all the Turkish students out of his school into technical schools'. He had felt very hurt when told by the principal that his son was better off at a technical school, because this minimised his son's opportunities to get to University or to get a proper education at secondary level. The misunderstandings and the need for more effective communication on all sides in this situation are obvious.

In addition to the misunderstandings from both parents and teachers mentioned above, several Turkish people with training in education referred to the problem of language, and the difficulty which parents with little formal education have in understanding the problems which their children can have at school. Parents see and hear their children speaking English and functioning within an English-speaking environment and therefore expect them to be able to perform well. They do not understand that the development and grasping of concepts, and the skill of writing well in a second language are much harder to learn. (It is important to say here that parents are not the only people who have difficulty in understanding the importance of language development and change from one language to another. Many (non English as a second language) teachers lack an appreciation of the vital part which language plays and the difficulties which students face in its acquisition. (Campbell, Barnett, Joy and McMeniman, 1984:91)

A number of Turkish parents have responded to their general frustrations in a very active way. They have formed an association, which is lobbying for improvements in education for their children. Their present proposal has grown out of a real sense of frustration in not being able to help their children as they would like to. They are urging government funding for the payment of teachers to be available for Turkish (and other migrant) children after school to assist them with their homework. They feel that this would be of assistance to children whose parents are not able to help them because they are tired, overworked and generally do not have the language or the education to help their children with school work.

Discrimination

A number of parents spoke not just of misunderstandings or lack of understanding, but of discrimination and prejudice. The father who thought that the principal of a school was trying to push all the Turkish students into technical schools is one example. The all female group thought that discrimination still existed at high schools. Their children were called wogs and told to go back to their own country. The mothers felt that this probably happened a lot more than they heard about because their children tended not to talk to them about such incidents, although they would like them to do so. Their concern was that such experiences affected their sons and daughters psychologically and made them less likely to continue with education. They suspected that their children were made to feel inferior to other students, particularly in schools were there were not many Turkish students.

Sources of Information

Parents and students mentioned two main sources of information about schooling and further education; one was the school and its resources, the other was networks of friends and acquaintances who were thought to have particular information.

The school: 'There is a long space between home and school'

For parents, schools were very often an inadequate source of information. The main reasons put forward for this were the lack of interpreters and the limited amount of information sent home to them in the Turkish language. Again and again, parents mentioned the difficulties they had with understanding changes at school, the progress of their children and the system in general as a result of not having access to information in Turkish. The situation was better where there were Turkish teachers and/or a Turkish teacher aide. However, there are very few trained primary or post-primary Turkish teachers. Parents talked about at least one school where there were significant numbers of Turkish students and requests for the appointment of a Turkish teacher had not yet been successful.

A self-perpetuating cycle seemed to be working for some parents. The more access to information was restricted through their own limited knowledge of English and the school's failure to provide relevant information in Turkish, the less comfortable they felt in going to the school and the more they lacked quite basic information. Such information may not have a direct influence on a child's future, but lack of it certainly adds to the difficulties which both parents and children have in coming to decisions which give students the best possible chance of succeeding at school.

One couple, who had high aspirations for their children and were very concerned and upset about problems they were having at school, did not know what the HSC was; another father said that did not know who to contact at the school about his son's work; others said that they had no idea what the Australian education system was about. A community worker pointed out another misunderstanding which some parents had. In Turkish schools, she said, there are no electives. Students start with a certain number of subjects and basically they continue to do these subjects. All are compulsory. Some Turkish parents in Australia expect that when their children start certain studies in year 7, they will continue with them. Very little of this basic information is conveyed by schools to parents in a way that they really understand. The lack of information is not confined to parents; students also can operate under misconceptions. One tertiary student confessed that when she sat for HSC five years ago, she did not realise that she had to get a certain level of marks to go to a tertiary institution. She was just aiming for a pass believing this to be sufficient. She worked extremely hard and fortunately, did much better than just pass.

The majority of parents we spoke with did not have close contact with the schools their children attended. However, one mother who had gone to speak to her daughters class teacher said that a good relationship had been established. She suggested that it was up to parents as well as teachers and schools to make moves to communicate with each other and that if this was done, some of the problems for children would be reduced.

Underlying most comments from parents about lack of information about schools and further education, and lack of understanding of the education system in general, was the belief that if they had more information, they would be able to both support and help their children more, and children would therefore achieve more. One mother felt that her daughter did not have much chance of going to University although she would dearly love to have her study at a tertiary institution. She said:

> I cannot be of any help to her because I don't speak English enough to help her with her studies.

Some parents mentioned that they felt particularly helpless when their children had to choose subjects. They wanted more support and assistance for their children at this stage, because it was often only later on that students found that they had cut off some options by making one choice over another.

For many parents, the feeling that they were restricted in their ability to help their sons and daughters in making decisions about their future, was added to by working long hours at physically demanding jobs which did not leave them much time for helping children. One student saw it differently. She said, in a mixed group of parents and students, that she got very little support from her parents and that despite their apparent concern to see her do well, she was not really supported by her parents; she had been lucky to get to a tertiary institution and her parents 'didn't really care about it'.

Most parents did not know whether there was a careers teachers at the school and those who did were unsure of the duties of a careers teacher or how they could actually help students. It was obvious in some mixed groups of students and parents that students did not pass on information about the careers teachers to their parents.

Once they had reached year 10 students certainly knew about the resources which careers teachers had. Most tended to see them as a source of information once you had made up your mind what you were interested in, rather than a person to go to in order to explore options and possibilities. Information about careers was gained mainly through one's own initiative asking for explanations of brochures, visiting the careers room, going to open days. There were a few students who felt that they did not have enough contact with the careers teachers. On the other hand, there were students at both year 12 and tertiary level who thought that their careers teacher had been very useful. In one school, the careers teacher was involved in students' choice of subjects and offered helpful advice.

Friends and acquaintances

Friends and acquaintances can be significant sources of advice and information concerning schooling and further education. One parent who had high aspirations for his daughter said that he sought out Turkish people he knew who might be able to help him with information about schools and about aspects of his daughter's studies. He pointed out that as relatively few Turkish people had gone very far in the education system, those who had tended to have a lot of parents contacting them for advice. Information about different schools was an important topic of conversation when he and his friends met.

Unfortunately, misinformation and misconceptions were also passed around. Both the bi-lingual interviewer and the research officer in this study were able to correct some errors of fact during discussions.

Some of the tertiary students we spoke with were consulted quite frequently about all sorts of matters to do with education and career options. They were asked to comment on homework, the best encyclopedia to buy, how to get into particular institutions and courses, and many other general matters about schools.

Making Decisions

The sons and daughters of the parents we spoke with who had left school after the period of compulsory schooling left for a variety of reasons, the most common of which was that it became obvious that they were not succeeding at school. Some parents were bitter and disillusioned about their children's lack of success and, as indicated above, blamed the schools and their own inability to help. Other parents had come to terms to with the fact that their children would probably not do as well as they had hoped. As one couple put it:

> We'll be happy if our daughters end up in an office job rather than a factory.

'We are the only people who can tell'

For students, year 10 was the time when they had to face possibilities for the future. Several students at this level said that what they most wanted was 'a bit of support from teachers and parents' in guiding them to make the right decisions. In general, they felt that their parents could not help them with the sort of anxieties they had about making the right decisions, because parents did not have an education themselves, did not understand the system and did not agree with some of the ways the schools operated. Students from one school were not confident that the school could help them succeed because it was a 'migrant' school. They believed that if they could go to a private school, they would have more chance of fulfilling their ambitions.

The students at year 12 level talked about the process they had gone through since year 10 in assessing what they were really capable of doing. Whereas parents provided some support in general, they believed that decisions they were making were essentially their own and based on what they were interested in as well as what they tended to be succeeding at. Some teachers were an influence in general terms for some students because they encouraged students to explore what they were good at and expected them to do their best.

Most of the tertiary students we spoke with had not made definite decisions about their future while they were school, or if they had made decisions, they changed or modified them later. One student talked about the difficulty she had of actually assessing what she was capable of and then believing in herself, when teachers were less than encouraging and her parents were of little help because what she was considering was so far from their experience. She described her school days and her present life as trying constantly to keep a balance between what she wanted for herself and the demands of family and the Turkish community which she was still part of and wished to remain part of.

As indicated earlier, several of the tertiary students had been encouraged in varying degrees by their parents to stay on to year 12. But decisions about a career direction had, they felt, been very much their own. One said, 'we are the only people who can tell, there's no-one else to help you'. Except in one instance, they said that their decisions about a particular career had not been directly influenced by their parents. Other influences had been more important:

> I think the school or a particular teacher influences you. The school I went to was really into community languages...My English teacher, looking back at it now, influenced me into languages. I used to really like her classes. I think the school really influenced me.

> We had all sorts of career days at school, people coming in for a half day... But that just turned me off because they were really boring and there weren't any real jobs talked about that I would have wanted to do. The best part was going around to colleges on information days. That's when I decided what I wanted to do.

Choice of occupations

Parents favoured some occupations over others for their children. Doctor and lawyer were considered very desirable occupations; teacher was a good second choice for females. While the parents' aspirations for their children to attain these high status occupations seemed to have some influence on what children wanted for themselves initially, young people were able more accurately to assess whether they were capable of the study involved.

Choice of occupation was for some parents, related to what they saw as acceptable in the Turkish community and what other young Turkish people had already gone into. One female student very much wanted to be a policewoman but she said she had already had conflict with her family about this because they believed that it was not a suitable occupation for her. The student was convinced that this was partly because her parents did not know of any other Turkish girl who had become a policewoman and they were very reluctant to have her be the first.

The tertiary students thought that, at least until recently, '... most Turkish students (were) channeled into science rather than humanities. They are encouraged to do these subjects by their own community and teachers.' One student explained:

> ...it's only now that schools are getting community languages and children are

> having a real choice. (Before) they were concentrating on English and you automatically got pushed into sciences.

Another student added that he had been pushed into science, which he didn't want to do and had 'only got out at the last minute' into the tertiary course he was now doing, which was a humanities based course.

Summary

Hope for the future of their children was a crucial aspect of migration for the Turkish families we spoke to, and when these hopes are not fulfilled, parents often have strong feelings that the education system has failed their children. This is particularly so when they feel that they have provided all the encouragement and material support which they can.

Many parents saw schools as failing to provide encouragement, good work habits and firm guidance for their children. Those young people who are succeeding at school are finding their way by commitment to their parents general views about the importance of education which includes the need to work hard.

Parents with little formal schooling themselves have difficulty understanding the system, communicating their concerns to the school and assisting their children with appropriate information.

Family and Turkish community attitudes, as well as school organisational factors and teacher attitudes have operated to restrict the choices of Turkish students. Within these restrictions, female students have had an even narrower range of possibilities for employment outside the home, given the social and cultural environment in which they live.

6. English-Speaking Background Families

The English-speaking background (ESB) groups were included in the study in order to see whether issues which emerged from the NESB groups were present or not for ESB families, rather than as a formal control group. ESB parents and students were contacted through two of the schools used to contact NESB parents. In each of the schools (one inner suburban, one relatively affluent outer suburban), parents and year 10 students were interviewed. As with the NESB groups, parents were selected by their willingness to spend some time with us talking about their children's schooling and future, and students by the willingness of their parents to give us permission to talk with them.

The Participants

The two suburbs from which families came, were very different. One was a very varied mixture of narrow streets and main arterial roads, residential and industrial buildings, high rise flats and narrow fronted cottages; the other was brick houses and flowered gardens, tree-lined side streets and busy highways, with an outer perimeter of large blocks and imposing two storey houses. The educational background of parents varied from completion of the compulsory years of schooling to tertiary training. While in both areas there were parents who had left school at the age of 15, and parents who had tertiary training, there was a greater percentage of inner suburban parents than outer suburban parents who had left school at the end of compulsory schooling, and a greater percentage of outer suburban parents than inner suburban parents who had some tertiary training. The great physical differences between the two suburbs were reflected in the fact that overall the occupational status of the outer suburban parents was higher than the inner suburban parents.

Aspirations and Values Concerning Education

The aspirations of most of the ESB parents for their children's future could perhaps be best summed up by saying that they would like them to stay on at school, they wanted them to have well paid and satisfying jobs, and they were concerned about their children's personal happiness. They felt that they could encourage but not push their children in any particular direction. As far as the young people were concerned, they too wanted jobs they would be happy in and they believed that they would make their own decisions largely without influence from parents. There were however, some obvious variations within these overall patterns.

A number of parents expressed confidence in their children; in their ability to make reasonable decisions, and to work sensibly towards the outcomes which they wanted. These parents wanted their children to have good jobs and to be happy. At least in talking to us, they did not seem overly anxious about their children's future because they had some faith in the capacity of their daughter or son to achieve, not necessarily in areas which depended on academic success. One example was a mother and her daughter who both seemed to be working towards the same goal for the daughter, with little conflict between them. The mother said she would be happy for her daughter to do HSC but it was not important that she do it. In fact, she believed that for some children, it could be a 'farce', a hurdle which was not necessary if a young person was not particularly interested in going on. This parent would feel satisfied so long as her daughter was happy in what she was doing and had a job which she enjoyed. Her daughter did in fact have ambitions and had already been to several short courses outside of school which could help her towards ultimately setting up a business in the beauty field. She was working quite well at school and didn't feel that her mother was putting any pressure on her.

Where students were achieving well at school, parents seemed to be more relaxed about their children's future. One mother whose son was doing well felt that he did not need to be 'channeled', that it was best to leave all options open (at year 10 stage anyway). The parents of this family had both left school at 15 years of age, not entirely through their own choice, and had worked hard to set up their own business. Being practically oriented herself, the mother believed that the best way to learn was to include some practical component in a course. She too had a fair degree of confidence in her son, and believed generally that, 'if they've got enough brains and drive, they'll get there'. She did not have to pressure her son into working and felt that the best thing she could for him was to

> ...tell him about the easy way and the hard way (studying at school and studying later at night school). It's OK if they decide to do it the hard way but you need to tell them what it's like.

Other parents were less confident about their children's ability to survive in a tough world. One father wanted his daughter to be secure and able to be independent in the future. Although he had no particular career in mind, he thought that the best thing she could do was go into a private business. However, he was worried about his daughter's future because the school and the peer group seemed to encourage 'free-wheeling'. He was concerned that she did not have a more practical attitude to the future and that she did not seem to realise she would have to put some effort into life to get something from it.

> I'd certainly like her to pass year 12 but I don't know whether she will. I'd like her to adopt a more practical view on life. I'd like her to look at something achievable...I don't think she'll get there.

This parent also believed that it was important for his daughter not to get things too easily. He tells his daughter, 'I'll help you get there, but I won't just give you the money'.

Some parents did not necessarily expect children to 'get it right the first time', that is, some recognised that it was difficult to decide what to do after leaving school. One young girl said that

> Mum suggested I do year 12, then get any sort of job I can, while I decide what I'm really interested in.

Although a number of parents said that they were encouraging their children to stay at school and complete year 12 (and one father said that he would be disappointed if his daughter didn't), they were not going to insist on this if their children had other reasonable plans.

Several parents had aspirations for their children to 'be happy and have a bit of money', but they seemed to lack either confidence that this would happen or a sense of control that they could help make it happen. One mother had left school at the end of compulsory schooling and her only full-time working experience before marrying was 18 months in a shoe factory. Her daughter was not doing well at school and often 'upset the teachers' by misbehaving. She hoped that her daughter would be able to stay at school a bit longer, but she felt that she didn't have any control over this. For both mother and daughter, the future seemed to be something which just happened, rather than something which you could make decisions about. Another parent felt that she didn't have much say over whether her son stayed at school or not because 'he makes his own decisions'. He was not doing very well at school and although she thought it would be better if he did stay at school, it seemed certain that he was going to leave as soon as he could get a job.

Most of the students thought that their parents wanted them to 'have a good job and be happy'; and the majority in both the inner suburban and the outer suburban school thought that their parents would want them to complete year 12, because it meant a better chance of a good job. They thought however, that the influence from parents was fairly subtle. A comment from an inner suburban student was typical:

> My parents say I can leave (school) if I want to but at the same time they tell me the good things about staying on to year 12.

All thought that their parents were concerned about their personal happiness as well as about getting a good education and a good job. Most families talked about their children's plans for the future quite a lot.

There were some differences between the students from the inner suburban school and the outer suburban school. In the former, although most had some ideas about what they would like to do in the future, they were generally a bit pessimistic about their general ability to succeed and they didn't think that they were doing as well as they could at school. Students at the outer suburban school were somewhat more optimistic about their personal prospects, although they had some pessimism and strong criticisms about the general state of society. They also had a strong sense of commitment to school values and little apparent rebellion about the basic need to study and succeed at school, although there were criticisms of some school policies and rules (it should be noted that these students were identified by a staff member as 'very bright and articulate'). There was less consensus in the group of students from the inner suburban school about commitment to school and its values and at least one student thought he would leave as soon as he could get a job.

It was to be expected that these self-selected parents took an interest in their children's schooling but there were variations in the degree of their involvement. Most commonly, parents asked their children general questions about school; how they were going, what they were doing, whether they had any homework. However, according to their children, some of the parents from the outer suburban area took a much closer interest in both the amount and content of homework. Some of their comments were:

> Mum's always peering into my homework. If I leave it on the table, she'll come and have a good look at it.

> They ask how much homework you've got, how much have you done, and if you're not getting much, why aren't you?
>
> ...they pick little mistakes on it.

In some cases, students saw this as interference and resented it a little, but it was also recognised as very strong support as the following comment illustrates:

> Last year my parents were pushing me to do homework and I used to get into trouble... This year, if I don't have any homework, I study and my parents have been happy about that... I think they're being mean not letting me out, but really they're just caring about your education.

One parent said that he and his wife 'put themselves out' to help their daughter with maths; another said she helped her daughter with assignments.

Gender

It is possible to make some very general statements about gender on the basis of the discussions with ESB parents and students.

- Most parents did not think that there were differences between the aspirations which they had for their daughters and for their sons and all said that they would encourage both sons and daughters to go as far as they could with schooling. They seemed to accept that boys and girls favoured different sorts of occupations and did not think there was much they could do about it.
- Two parents, both mothers and from different suburbs, had encouraged their daughters to look at non-traditional careers. One student identified

herself as coming from a 'left-wing feminist family', who would definitely be opposed to discrimination in careers. She was planning a career in either the medical or linguistics area. The other was not planning a non-traditional career but said that her mother sometimes 'talked about apprenticeship and well paid jobs like plumbers'.

- On the whole, the year 10 girls seemed to have clearer ideas than the boys about what they wanted to do in the future. This was the case in both suburbs. This impression may be partly due to the fact that the girls tended to be more articulate than the boys.
- Several of the girls felt that at present their mothers were more influential than their fathers as far as plans for the future were concerned. They added that it wasn't that their fathers were not interested in what they did, in fact they were quite concerned; it was just that mothers' views tended to have more influence. Fathers who were not living with their children (and there were several in both the inner suburban and the outer suburban families) were not seen as a major influence on decisions about the future. In most of these families, young people said that they did not see their fathers very often.
- There were strong indications in one family that a cycle of low aspirations and lack of achievement at school for females was established and would be very hard to break. For the daughter, it seemed that her lack of success at school, her limited self esteem, the example she had of her mother's experiences, together with the absence of anyone who expected her to achieve anything much, were likely to mean that she would repeat a pattern of a series of relationships with males who mistreated her.

School and Preparation for the Future

On the whole, parents were accepting of the schools their children attended. They had criticisms but these were not stated with anything like the feeling and emotion which was apparent in the comments of some NESB parents. Neither did the comments of ESB parents centre around the major concerns identified by NESB parents, that is, inadequate discipline, not enough homework and lack of a uniform in schools (although these issues were certainly mentioned).

A few comments were general; most related to what parents knew about the school which their children attended.

Curriculum

Although parents were generally happy about the curriculum of their children's school as a preparation for the future, several made some specific suggestions.

- One mother thought that young people could benefit from more direct preparation for jobs such as learning how to write a letter of application, general consumer education, work oriented studies and areas which generally 'had more to do with life'. She related this to a general comment that 'a lot of the basic stuff seems to be left out' and gave as an example the fact that schools didn't seem to teach things like writing a simple letter of complaint to a firm.
- Related to the above were suggestions from several parents that learning should be related to the 'real world' whenever possible; this did not seem to

mean doing away with academic subjects, but rather that learning by doing something was better than learning about it in theory. These parents were quite supportive of the school in general.

- Another parent wanted to see his son do more maths and science. He had a training in the sciences himself and believed that his son was going to have a much more secure future if the school placed more emphasis on technology. As it was, his son was able to opt out of continuing study in these areas and would not have a good grounding in them.

In commenting on curriculum, students from both schools mentioned issues of choice and relevance.

- Students at the outer suburban school said that they enjoyed going to their school and thought that it was doing a relatively good job of preparing them for the future. However, sometimes it was difficult for them to see the relevance of some parts of the academic curriculum, and they would have preferred a wider choice of subjects at the year 10 level, particularly subjects which were more relevant to careers. There was disagreement on what should be core subjects and what electives would be relevant; some wanted more consumer education oriented subjects; others thought there should be more computer studies.
- Some inner suburban school students wanted 'more choice' of subjects and several mentioned that they would like to be able to do a language but 'you could only do it if you spoke the language at home because they (the classes) are too advanced'. 'Relevance' was also an issue. Students said that it was hard to keep up interest and to feel committed to study when they couldn't see the relevance of some subjects to what they wanted to do in the future.

Achievement Orientation

Several parents from both schools were concerned that their children were not pushed enough at school. This was not so much a concern about discipline but a belief that school was too easy, not enough demands were made, subjects were not challenging enough and therefore children were not getting a sense of the application and drive which was necessary to survive in the world. One father said that when he visited the school, he felt that his anxieties about his daughter's progress were not being listened to and that teachers seemed to be 'happy that she (his daughter) was happy'. This parent felt that sometimes he had to be the ogre in the family to try to get his daughter to take a practical view about the future. Although he was not blaming the school entirely, he thought that the general fairly 'free and easy' atmosphere there was not helping his daughter to take a practical view and he feared that she would be 'left behind'.

> I'm worried about her future. Unless you are exceptional or you have money, it's very hard these days...

Although the parents at the outer suburban school did not see 'discipline' as a major problem, there were indications that it was a concern for some. Several parents thought that some teachers were 'not strict enough' and the students reported that parents sometimes 'threatened' them with being sent to a private school if they 'didn't do the right things', the implication being that at a private school they would be forced to do the right thing. (None of these students wanted to go to a private school and in fact they had a number of criticisms of private schools in general.) One family had decided to send their younger child to a private school in the hope that he would get a more structured and disciplined start than the parents thought was possible at the outer suburban school.

Most of the students at the inner suburban school we spoke with were relatively happy at the school but there was some dissatisfaction and uncertainty about what they might achieve there. This was also reflected in the attitudes of some parents. Several students thought that the 'subjects were too basic' and there was not enough attention given to students with problems, which sometimes made it difficult to work because of disruptive behaviour in the classrooms. All but one of the students had something in mind as a future career but all had some reservations about whether they would make their goals.

One factor mentioned by both parents and students at the inner suburban school which was not mentioned at the outer suburban school was the effect of what might be called the school's 'image'. Before children started at the school, they and their parents had 'heard stories'; stories about 'drugs', 'louts' and 'discipline problems'. Students were quick to say that most of these stories were not true or were exaggerated. However, one parent had considered other schools which were relatively close by as alternatives and another really wanted his son to go to a school with a uniform. It is not possible to say what interrelation, if any, there is between expectations about the school, students' performance and choices which are made towards a future occupation.

ESB students, as all other students we spoke with, made clear distinctions between different sorts of teachers:

> Some teachers really understand students and really care about them...the good ones are interested in you as a person and want to help you. The others are in it for the money.

Career assistance

The need for students at year 10 level to have help in choosing subjects and making decisions was mentioned by parents and students from both schools.

Parents pointed out that students were facing very important choices, and they, the parents, did not feel competent to give good advice, particularly when they frequently did not know exactly what the subject entailed.

Students from both schools believed that they should have more information about careers and further education. A number of students from the inner suburban school had used the resources of the school, particularly the careers teacher, to find out information about jobs they were interested in, or to get details of college and TAFE courses. All of these students had done work experience. Students from the outer suburban school seemed to be less familiar with the schools resources in this area. Some thought that 'careers information was very undeveloped at the school'. (This may have been partly because they did not have a strong need for information at present and were therefore unaware of what the school offered.)

Sources of Information

Families had a variety of sources of information relevant to occupational choice and it is difficult to make any general statements here.

85

Schools were certainly the main source of information about further education, that is the details of course options and pre-requisites or how to go about getting them. Some parents mentioned the increasing complexity of courses and institutions which made it very difficult for students to decide between courses, and for parents to help in that decision. Because the students we spoke with were in year 10, they tended to see such decisions in the future, particularly if they were intending to complete year 12.

As for general information about a range of occupations, parents, parents' friends, relatives and friends were all seen as people to talk to and get information from. Some students didn't feel that they had much information about the occupation they were thinking of at present. They were also unsure about where they would go to get it, but they were not overly concerned because they felt that they 'still had time to find out anyway'.

Students from the outer suburban school thought that parents and friends of parents would be able to provide quite a lot of what they might need and even if they couldn't, they would have some ideas of how to go about getting it or know others who could help. Not all of the parents of these students were so confident about their own ability to help in this way. One mother said,

> I can really only offer him (her son) support and help if he needs it. You can only suggest things you've been in contact with yourself.. There's a lot I don't know.

It was apparent however, that even if parents thought they couldn't provide detailed information about a range of occupations, they were helping their children in all sorts of indirect ways. One mother said that she enjoyed helping her daughter find out about jobs and

> ...if she gets an idea, I often follow it up. I do the research, chase up the books or make a phone call.

The above comments came from parents from the outer suburban area. One inner suburban parent said:

> If I hear something on the radio about a type of job which I think (her daughter) would be interested in, I tell her. I guess I'd do what I could to help her follow it up if she was interested. She really doesn't know what she wants to do and I try to give her some ideas.

A student from the inner suburban school mentioned that her mother brings home pamphlets and information which she thinks might interest her.

It was apparent that several parents from the inner suburban school had limited access to information and limited resources to draw upon. One mother felt that she couldn't help her daughter much and relied on the school to tell the daughter what she needed to know about training for jobs. However, she had been able to help her daughter with some casual work at a place where she (the mother) used to work casually. She also hoped that her daughter would be able to get a job through her second period of work experience.

Another mother had tried to help her son by asking a relative whether he knew of any jobs where he worked, but she said her son was also trying to find something and would probably leave school as soon as he did find a job.

The influence of brothers, sisters and other relatives seemed to vary with the individual student and overall, did not seem to be a major source of information for the students we spoke with. One student mentioned a cousin who was doing the same sort of job which she was interested in and who she talked to quite a lot; another student said she had learnt what not to do from her brother who had 'messed around, got into trouble and failed University'; another had a brother who had the same interest in music as he had and they talked quite a lot about possible jobs.

To summarise, schools were important sources of information about further education and to some extent about different occupations for most students; parents from the outer suburban area were seen by their children as providers of general assistance and they did in fact fulfil this role in a number of ways; friends and siblings were helpful in some cases.

Summary

English speaking background parents from both inner suburban and outer suburban areas were concerned that their children have secure futures and occupations in which they were happy. Although most wanted to see their children complete year 12, (and some certainly expected that they would), they were reluctant to push them into this and to some extent relied on their children to make reasonable decisions about the future.

Parents from the outer suburban area saw the school as providing a good preparation for the future, although some thought the school could help students more with subject choices and expect more commitment from them; parents and students from the inner suburban school were less confident that students would achieve their goals.

Parents helped their children towards decisions about the future by providing general information about occupations, taking an interest in and assisting with school and homework, encouraging and supporting them. However, parents varied in their ability to do this, and it is suggested that their own educational experiences of success or failure, and their own sense of self-esteem are significant factors in the variation.

7. Summary

This section brings together information about family aspirations and values, attitudes towards school, interaction between home and school, and knowledge about school, further education and occupations; that is, those home environment and home influence factors which were the focus of the discussions and interviews with each group. The intention is to summarise, rather than to comment and draw out conclusions. The final section of the report will discuss issues and implications which arise from the study.

Introduction

There are dangers in summarising information of the sort presented in this report. Much of the diversity of individual experience is lost; important social and cultural differences become blurred; it is easier for stereotypes and ethnocentrism to creep in. However, there is also value in identifying the commonalities of experience and the differences which emerge. Drawing the threads together helps to establish what the major issues are, and to indicate important areas of desirable action.

Similarities across the NESB families in relation to decision making about children's school retention and after-school destinations quickly emerged. In fact, they were striking enough to suggest that non-English speaking background and the experience of re-settlement (the most common factors across the groups) are sufficiently strong to sometimes blur cultural differences. However, despite these strong influences, there {I}were{R} differences between NESB families from different cultural backgrounds and they need to be recognised. The tendency to skate over cultural difference and regard different ethnic settler groups as 'the same', both shows ignorance on the part of those who make no distinctions and is generally not at all helpful for individuals in those groups. (The comments of Chinese parents in this study that Australians generally and many Australian authorities tended to regard 'all refugees as Vietnamese' is an example of this; so also is evidence from some young Turkish people that schools in the early years of Turkish and Lebanese migration made few distinctions between children from these countries.)

On the other hand, in talking about differences (and indeed about similarities) we need to be very aware of ethnocentrism and the possible influence of cultural stereotypes, which ultimately deny the subjective experience of individuals.

The following summary refers to NESB families, with reference to ESB families where there are apparent differences. It must be remembered that these comments refer only to the people who participated in the study.

Overview

The study aimed to gather qualitative information about the family decision making factors that influence young people's school retention and post-school destination. The group and individual discussions conducted for the study, which included people with a range of backgrounds and attitudes, revealed both considerable consistencies across NESB groups as well as some differences between and within groups.

Across groups and irrespective of parents' own educational background, parents from each of the non-English speaking background groups had consistently high educational aspirations for children, and said that they made few distinctions between sons and daughters. However, within groups there was a diversity of views about schools, great differences in the amount of information which people had about schools and access to careers and further education, and a variety of ways in which family aspirations related to, or were in conflict with, children's school experiences. Some of the differences were clearly related to parents' educational background, and parents' understanding of both the general nature of education and the Australian system.

In addition, our discussions tended to support the view that other things being equal, educational achievement and transition to vocational success is generally easier when there is a strong educational push from the family, support from parents and/or other relevant family members, and the back-up of accurate and realistic information. The first two were present in most of the non-English speaking background families included in our discussions; the third was not.

Aspirations and Values: Parents

- For many NESB parents, a secure future for their children was both a reason for leaving their home country, and something which made the move worthwhile. Education was seen as one of the keys to achieving this. Length of time in Australia did not seem to make a great difference to the strength with which this was expressed. For example, both recently arrived Vietnamese parents and Greek parents who had come to Australia as young people themselves, shared a belief in the importance of education and placed great hopes in their children's future through achievements in the education system.
- Most of the ESB parents we spoke with also wanted their children to do well, but compared with NESB parents, they tended to vary more in the emphasis which they placed on the importance of education. That is to say, there was a wider range of commitment to, and belief in, education as a means of succeeding.
- Parents in each of the NESB groups had high educational aspirations for their children irrespective of their own educational background. Parents who had not completed primary education themselves tended to see education as an answer, a way out, a means of avoiding the hardships they had experienced; educated parents, particularly those who had lost status in coming to Australia, saw it as a way of establishing some security in a new country. Both groups of parents were prepared to make personal sacrifices to provide their children with what they believed to be the best education they could afford.
- In contrast, ESB parents did not have uniformly high educational aspirations for their children irrespective of their own educational background. Even amongst the small number of ESB participants, there was considerable variation. For example, parents who had left school at the end of the compulsory period had a variety of attitudes. Some wanted their children to complete high school; others believed that educational opportunities could be taken up later; while others who had themselves never achieved at school seemed to have both limited aspirations and expectations about their children's educational achievement.

- As far as educational aspirations for children were concerned, on the surface there were not noticeable differences between Greek and Turkish parents who migrated to Australia, and Indo-Chinese parents who came as refugees. All saw educational success as very important and highly desirable. There were powerful personal experiences repeated across ethnic groups which tended to reinforce the drive for children's education. Of particular importance was the fact that many parents who had worked or were still working on the factory floor did not want their children to have to do so. A further relevant experience which was shared by some parents across all ethnic groups was a drop in occupational status after coming to Australia.
- Education becomes more important as a way of establishing oneself when opportunities, networks and pathways which existed in the home country are no longer present. In their country of origin, many Chinese families had small businesses into which young people might go; young people in rural Vietnam might work on the family holding. For Turkish and Greek families also, leaving their country meant leaving strong family and neighbourhood networks which provided opportunities for employment.
- Despite the similarities noted above, there were different motives mentioned for high aspirations for children. For example, Turkish parents with little formal education were concerned that their children, through education, were able to 'skip a (social) class', to be upwardly mobile and to escape the unrelenting grind of factory work. Educated Vietnamese parents were concerned that children gain qualifications to establish themselves in a job which had security, partly because of the insecurity they experienced as refugees. Community pride, the feeling of wanting children to achieve because of pride in one's cultural heritage, was also mentioned as a motivation for Vietnamese parents.
- Most parents were realistic about what their children were capable of. They certainly had high hopes, but they recognised their children's ability as a constraining force. However, in some cases, lack of information about the education system, poor communication between school and parents, unrealistic expectations about what schooling itself can actually accomplish, and the unwillingness of children to let their parents know of their problems at school did seem to lead to unrealistic aspirations and expectations.

Aspirations and Values: Young People

- Most of the students we spoke with showed some understanding of their parents' aspirations for them; they were aware of the reasons why parents wanted them to achieve. This refers to both NESB and ESB students.
- To a large degree students accepted their parents' values concerning the importance of education. In general, they felt that parents supported and encouraged them even if parents and young people did not agree on all matters relating to school.
- Although a few male students felt pressured by parents, most believed that decisions about their future were up to them.
- In the cases where parents did seem to have unrealistic aspirations for their children, the children seemed to have a much clearer idea of what was possible for themselves. At school, students begin to get an idea of their

capabilities, of how difficult or easy it is to achieve in certain areas, and of how they stand in relation to other students with particular capabilities. (Schools of course can also operate to prevent and discourage students to do this, or to give students a very negative view of themselves.) Although the process of personal assessment occurs over a period of time, our study suggested that year 10/11 can be a crucial period for realistic assessment. For example, Turkish students mentioned that although their early plans were centred on high status occupations favoured by their parents, they gradually began to realise that they might have to aim at something different, given their performance in particular subjects.

Aspirations for Daughters

The many and complex issues relating to different decisions which NESB families make about the education and future of their daughters and their sons were not able to be fully explored in this study. A recent report to MACMME (Tsolidis, 1986) provided some valuable insights into NESB girls and education, including the attitude of parents to their daughters' education. The study included Greek and Turkish students and their families, but did not include Indo-Chinese students.

The following points emerged from the present study:

- Parents (particularly mothers) in each of the NESB groups stated that the education of daughters was important. In all NESB groups, parents talked about the general social changes in females roles which had occurred over the past fifteen or so years. The most commonly mentioned reasons for considering girls' education as important were the need for girls to have some degree of independence and the desirability of having educated mothers who could help their children.
- Although many NESB parents said that they made no distinctions between the education of their sons and their daughters, the future of daughters and sons was often seen quite differently. Sons were identified as future breadwinners and supporters of families; the future role of daughters was seen in terms of being a wife and mother.
- Factors mentioned (by parents and/or young people) as influencing decisions about the education and future of NESB girls included social restrictions on girl's behaviour, expectations about the family roles which daughters would fulfil, attitudes of friends and neighbours, the desirability of a good marriage, and what were seen as appropriate occupations for young women.
- Parental and community attitudes as to what constitutes a suitable job for girls of a particular ethnic group are influential and naturally enough, family judgement of whether an occupation is suitable or not is influenced by what was familiar in the country of origin. The tendency of Vietnamese girls to choose science oriented subjects and occupations is particularly interesting in this regard.
- The study offered some tentative support, based on several family situations, for the idea that where there are only girls in the family, or an only child who is a daughter, educational aspirations which would normally be directed towards boys are focussed on the daughters. Although the actual examples of this came from Turkish families, it is certainly possible that it applies to other NESB groups, as well as to ESB girls. Such a possibility needs further investigation.

- Financial considerations can play a major part in decisions about girls' education and post-school options. There were suggestions that, all other things being equal, if the family can only afford for one child to continue at school, or to go on to tertiary study, boys' education will get preference over girls'.
- Period of time in Australia, and the effect of that on family financial resources, can also influence decisions about girls' education (as it can about boys'). An example of a Greek family is quoted in this study. A younger daughter was able to go on to tertiary education, because the family's financial situation had improved, whereas her older sisters were not able to.
- The well documented effects of girl's lack of self-esteem on aspirations and performance emerged in this study most clearly in relation to several ESB young women. Mothers who had not succeeded at school themselves, and who had a very short period of time in the paid workforce before marriage had few expectations that their daughters would succeed at school, and very limited access to information and ideas which could help their daughters make choices at school or post-school.

Attitudes Towards Schools

- Many NESB parents were concerned about some aspects of schooling and were anxious that schools might be contributing to the general directions in which society was moving, or at least that schools were not trying to counter what was happening. The complex set of general social concerns which was voiced included the breaking down of close family ties, young people's questioning of parental and other authority, changing attitudes concerning the value of hard work, and the threat posed to society by drugs. In addition, some parents were concerned about the economic situation and what this would mean for their children's future.
- The ESB parents we spoke with were also concerned about general directions in which society was moving, but schools were not so frequently mentioned as a central factor in this. These parents were more likely to see wider social movements as a threat, for example, that the media was a bad influence on children or that consumerism and advertising meant that their children expected material goods.
- The specific concerns about school most commonly mentioned by NESB parents (and to a lesser extent by some ESB parents) were inadequate discipline, not enough homework being given, lack of a school uniform and lack of what might be termed 'moral education' in schools. There were two main reasons given by NESB parents for these concerns. The first was that parents saw school policies and practices as conflicting with the sorts of values which they were trying to teach at home; the second was that they believed young people were not being encouraged to work hard and to achieve. This meant that their chances of a secure future and a good job were reduced. It was difficult to identify any differences between NESB groups concerning these matters which could not be attributed to differences in personality and individual style. For example, in all NESB groups except perhaps the Chinese, we found a small number of parents (generally male, but occasionally female) who were very angry about what they saw as the shortcomings in regard to discipline of the school their children attended.

- Young people (both NESB and ESB) were less concerned than their parents about the effect of differences between home and school, but NESB girls particularly were concerned about discipline and preferred teachers who could control classrooms.

Home/school Interaction

- Only a few NESB parents had regular contact with their children's school. Those who did were involved in a parents' group organised specifically for NESB parents (from one cultural background or a number). In most cases these groups seemed to provide a feeling of identification with the school, a greater understanding of the school programs and perhaps most importantly, personal contact with staff members.
- Language was identified as a major barrier to home/school interaction by parents from each NESB group. In particular, many Turkish, Vietnamese and Chinese parents (the most recently arrived groups) felt reticent about approaching schools because of difficulties of communication. Many of the misunderstandings between home and school could be traced to problems of language.
- A number of parents, particularly Greek parents, thought that parents could and should initiate more moves towards contacting teachers when they wanted information about children's progress or the school program.
- In cases where parents felt that teachers had some understanding of their particular ethnic group and the needs of children in relation to the family, they were more satisfied that their children's schooling was preparing them adequately for the future. However, it was generally agreed that it was very difficult and perhaps not necessary for ESB teachers to understand different cultures in detail.
- NESB students thought that a minority of teachers actually understood their needs; however, they tended to judge teachers according to their encouragement and general understanding, probably more than by their understanding of different cultures.
- Some parents favoured a more academic, rather than a less academic curriculum, as the best preparation for the future, and some were prepared to shop around for the school which they thought best provided this. However, many NESB parents were reticent about commenting on curriculum because they felt that they did not know sufficient about it.

Information About Schools and Occupations

- Many NESB parents felt frustrated because they wanted very much to be able to help and advise their children about school and careers but were unable to do so because they lacked knowledge of the system, or their English was not good enough. The frustration grew out of a belief that if they could help, their children would be more likely to succeed.
- Misunderstandings resulting from differences between the Australian education system and the system which the parent experienced as a child, sometimes disadvantaged the student and led to frustration, anger or bewilderment for the parent.
- Parents sought help in making decisions from a variety of sources. For NESB parents, these included the school, particularly where there was an

ethnic teacher aide or teachers of their own cultural background; community and welfare organisations which they visited for other purposes; friends and acquaintances who had children, and young people who had been successful in some area. Many parents admitted that there was much about schools and career options which they did not know. They relied on the school to help and advise their children and relied on children to pass on relevant information to them. Students could be selective in what they passed on to parents.

- Misunderstandings caused by language and cultural differences were shared to some extent by all recently arrived and some not so recently arrived NESB parents. However, parents who had secondary or tertiary education seemed to be more confident in dealing with schools and were more familiar with general aspects of any education system. Thus they and their children had potentially easier access to information than families where there was not a background of formal education.
- Some parents felt that they did not get clear information from the school about how their children were progressing and this made it difficult to advise them about plans for the future. The transition between year 10 and year 11 provided a particular problem for parents. Many felt that they were misled by school reports in the early secondary school years into thinking that their children were capable of achieving well in later years.
- Students' reactions to the differences between the early and later years of post-primary school were not the same as their parents' (although to some extent they were related). They were not so much concerned (as parents were) with being misled, as with the difference in the amount of work and effort which they felt they had to put in in years 7-10 and years 11 and 12.

Decision Making

- Even when they were aware of influence from their parents, most young people, both NESB and ESB, believed that they were able to make their own decisions about a particular occupation. However, this was not always easy for young NESB people who often felt very much on their own in making decisions about the future. This was particularly so when parents felt that they could not help very much and teachers were not very encouraging. This put a great deal of pressure on students to assess their capabilities and to decide which path to take.
- Students believed that teachers' expectations about them were important. If teachers believed in them and expected them to achieve, it was easier to succeed, although a minority of students were obviously able to achieve despite lack of encouragement from teachers and despite a lack of belief in their capacity to achieve. Some students had to work extremely hard to maintain a strong sense of what they wanted to do, in the face of teachers doubting that they were capable and suggesting that they should try other areas. In a number of cases, this seemed to be the result of preconceived ideas of what students from various ethnic groups were capable of, and particularly what females in those groups were capable (and not capable) of.
- There were a number of family factors which contributed to NESB students considering a limited range of post-school options, probably more limited than the range which ESB students consider. These included re-

strictions posed by limited English language skills, the sway of some favoured or desirable occupations, lack of information about a wide range of occupations, and cultural preferences and avoidances of some occupations. As a broad generalisation, the range tends to widen with the number of years of settlement of the ethnic group as a whole.

8. Issues and Implications

The concluding section of this report aims to:

- identify questions and issues which arose from the study;
- discuss implications for schools and other bodies concerned with the post-school destinations of young people;
- suggest areas of further study.

Introduction

The interaction between the environment and influence of the home, and the schooling system which young people are required to take part in, constitutes one major set of factors influencing the post-school outcomes of young NESB people. Discussions with parents suggested that there are at least two important areas in this interaction where there is a lack of congruence. Firstly, it would appear that many parents see a gap between the aspirations which they have for their children's future, and the faith which they have in schools to make these aspirations a reality. Secondly, discussions highlighted some apparent differences between the views of professional educators (as indicated by recent directions in educational policy) and many parents. These two issues, the potential which they have to affect the post-school outcomes of NESB students and how the lack of congruence mentioned above may be addressed, underlie much of the discussion in this concluding section.

Our study indicated that parents conveyed to their children a strong sense of the need to work hard and succeed at school and then to enter an occupation which offered some status and economic security. While the same could no doubt be said of many Australian born parents and many English-speaking background migrants, the experience of leaving one's country and re-settling (whether as a migrant or a refugee), together with the difficulties experienced by non-English speaking background settlers in an English speaking country, highlight and perhaps intensify NESB parents' aspirations for their children.

As expected, the motivations behind parents' aspirations were complex and parents identified a variety of reasons for wanting children to succeed. These included practical factors such as children having a stable future with some economic security; emotional factors such as children's happiness, the desire to see them do well, a reward or a justification for re-settlement; status factors, such as recognition by friends and the wider community, and cultural factors such as the reciprocal obligations of parents and children at different life stages.

Schools and schooling can be the focus of strong emotions for NESB parents because of the importance which is placed on the future of children, and the fact that NESB young people have been clearly disadvantaged educationally, for example, as shown by their limited entry until recently into tertiary education. A recent paper argues that with the exception of some recently arrived NESB migrants, the assumption that ethnic students are disadvantaged is no longer true (Birrell and Seitz, 1986). While there are now greater numbers of students from a non-English speaking background entering tertiary institutions, our study suggests that there are still many NESB young people who experience difficulties at school and hence have limited future options.

Parents' aspirations for their children translate into a particular set of expectations about how schools can and should be making sure that children succeed. Our study showed that there is a concern that schools exercise greater discipline and emphasise the value of hard work and commitment to the task. Although this was not teased out in any great detail, it is almost certain that there are a number of elements here. For example, some parents emphasised the belief that all children needed disciplined guidance and if they were not required to work hard at school, they would not learn the value and importance of hard work and would therefore not succeed in the workplace. Other parents stressed the importance of respect for older people generally and felt that teachers should demand respect by their actions and their behaviour. Yet others stressed the responsibility of schools to provide students with skills to face a competitive workplace and an uncertain economic situation.

What is the impact of these factors on young NESB people? They are at the interface of home and school values. We can assume that at the broadest level, home and school aims coincide, that there is a common desire for young people to succeed in school and achieve skills which will be of use in later life and which will contribute to personal happiness and security. However, our study indicated that there are points of difference in how these aims are achieved, and misinformation and misunderstandings about the relative positions of home and school.

Young people are often left to sort out these difference themselves, and while some are obviously capable of doing this and go ahead to make decisions which lead to successful futures, there are many who cannot and do not. The disjunction which they experience may be too great a burden to cope with without considerably more assistance.

This conclusion outlines a numbers of suggestions which might contribute to more young people having a better chance of achieving outcomes which are consistent with what they and their families want for the future. Our study suggested that more resources and greater efforts are needed to improve understanding between schools and parents, and to increase the access of NESB families to information about the education system and career options.

The Role of Schools

While the focus of this study means that many of the issues and implications which emerge relate to schools, they are also relevant to other bodies and individuals who are, or could be, involved in young people's transition from school to work or further study. The report is intended to provide a further source of information, rather than to outline another set of 'shoulds' for teachers. In recent years, the range and number of demands placed on teachers has increased quite dramatically. The expectation that they should know how to deal with a whole range of social issues and adolescent problems (usually without specific training), as well as be skilled and knowledgeable in their teaching areas, means that they often work under great pressure. It is hoped that this report will not add to that pressure but will provoke discussion, contribute to greater understanding of the family influences on some of their students, and assist in the task of preparing young NESB people for a successful post-school future.

When there are apparent differences between the values espoused by parents and the values which underlie the education system (as there often are), there are a number of directions which schools can take. They can press on regardless and ignore or overlook the differences; they can explore ways for parents and staff to identify which are real points of difference and which are the result of misunderstanding or misinformation on either side; they can listen carefully to what parents say and together with parents (and children where appropriate) work towards ways in which some parent concerns might be taken into account; they can decide that there are certain things which they are not prepared to change and explain to parents and children what these are and why they are not prepared to change. It is probable that there are elements of all these approaches (and perhaps others) evident in many schools and the extent to which any one element exists possibly varies from time to time and issue to issue. Nevertheless, it is suggested that it might be useful to look at what emerged from the present study with these suggestions in mind.

Home Influences

Parental aspirations

Enough has been said in this report and elsewhere to illustrate the high aspirations which many NESB parents have for their children. High aspirations and the desire for a better life for their children could well reflect the drive which leads people to migrate in the first place. The Turkish parent who said that his life and that of his wife were 'over' and that 'there were no chances left' for them, also expressed a very strong hope that his daughter would have a better life.

The positive effects of high parental aspirations coupled with appropriate physical and emotional support, were illustrated by the success of some young people we spoke with. It was apparent from their comments that parental support, encouragement and belief in their capacity was very important, even if high expectations were sometimes a burden to them.

However, high aspirations are not all that is required for success nor do they always have such a positive effect. The outline of discussions with NESB groups (sections 2-6 of this report) and the summary which is provided in the previous section give some indications of the different effects of high aspirations but we need to look more carefully at how they interact with factors such as parents' educational background, gender of the student, the young person's ability, the school which they attend, teachers' attitudes and the other supports which are provided for students.

Our study showed that parents and students were ready to express views about schools and it was apparent that there were clear differences between schools and the ways in which they catered for students of different ethnic groups. These differences were sometimes, but not always, related to the number of NESB students in the school.

- Where parents felt that the school had made a concerted attempt to take account of the needs of their NESB students, they felt more positive about preparation of their children for the future•
- Where parents were part of a parent group, they felt that they had more access to staff members and could discuss their children's future more readily.
- Only a minority of students said that they had discussed their futures

with class teachers. There were several examples of parents who had spoken to teachers directly about their children's careers and who were pleased that they had done so. It may seem a simple place to start, but discussing with young people their aspirations and their parents' aspirations for them, can be a first step towards better understanding and perhaps better preparation for the future. If it is true to say that many teachers are not aware of the aspirations or plans which most of their students (non-English speaking background or English-speaking background) have, then introducing the topic both formally in classes, and informally in conversation, may provide opportunities for valuable discussion about the future, and potentially greater understanding for both teachers and students. It may also help to identify what supports the student has at home and whether there are conflicts with parents about the future.

- Nearly all schools involved in the present study had significant NESB populations and most had established priorities for their NESB students as well as their ESB students. However, some parents who participated in our study were concerned that where there was only a small number of students of a particular ethnic group in the school, the particular needs of these students tended to be overlooked or subsumed under a general school policy. If this is the case, it may be that schools which have a small number of NESB students overall can overlook these students. Some ex-students who had attended such schools confirmed that little attention was paid to their particular needs.
- Although in our study there were only a few instances of students who seemed to be under unrealistic pressure from their parents, comments from some professionals about the effect of this on children indicated the need for some attention to the issue. What are 'realistic' and 'unrealistic' aspirations can really only be sorted out with improved communication between home and school. Aspirations can be 'unrealistic' if they are beyond the student's ability to achieve, or if they are based on inaccurate assumptions about education and what schools can do. Where there is good communication between home and school about students' abilities and progress, and parents have some understanding of what the school is aiming to achieve, students and their families have a better chance of making appropriate decisions about the future.

Education of daughters

The majority of parents in all non-English speaking background groups stated that the education of their daughters was important either because societal changes now meant that females needed to have some degree of independence, or (more frequently) because it was important that mothers of children be educated. As indicated in the previous section many of the issues relating to family influences on post-school outcomes for girls were not able to be explored in this study. For example, the discussions did not explore home influences such as girls' relationships with brothers and other males of their age; the assignment of domestic tasks at home; parents' expectations about girls' social interaction at home and at school, and cultural differences between acceptable behaviour for daughters and sons.

The above factors, together with many other non-family influences have consistently been shown to result in girls having generally lower self esteem (irrespective of their actual achievements) than boys and considering a much more restricted range of post-school options. Tsolidis (1986) found this to be particularly so for NESB girls. Brown (1984) includes a listing of publications relevant to educational and occupational outcomes of NESB girls.

While the scope of the present study did not allow a major focus on gender differences, a number of issues were raised by what was said by participants in the discussions.

- Some young women clearly implied that parental expectations of what were suitable jobs was a consideration which they had to take account of in planning their future direction. It was also apparent that favoured and/or acceptable jobs for young Greek and Turkish women had changed over time, gradually but considerably, as community attitudes had changed. This seems to indicate that if there is to be a further broadening of options for NESB young women, parents will need to be involved. Where schools recognise the importance of parental attitudes in the career decisions of young women, they are more likely to encourage parents to seek information from the school, establish ways in which they can do this and be involved in career planning activities with their daughters.
- Many schools have discussed gender equity policies and a lot fewer have programs aimed at some aspect of equity. Our study indicated strong stated support from NESB parents for the education of their daughters. When schools are planning effective gender equity programs this stated support could be built upon.
- If NESB parents are concerned about the education of their daughters, they need to be given accurate information about the education of girls in the school and in society generally. They need to be aware of the options which girls have in their school, the subject choices which they make and the implications of these for the future. Those schools which have fed back information to parents about such matters have sometimes been able to provoke useful discussion amongst parents and to increase interaction between home and school.

The present study suggested a number of issues for further study regarding girl's schooling and post-school options.

- What is the effect on the successful schooling of NESB girls whose mothers have had little or no formal education themselves, but who have a strong belief in education as a way of daughters increasing their status? Does the potential distance which may be created between mother and daughter make it more difficult for girls to succeed? If so, are there ways in which the potential for distance between mother and daughter can be lessened or made more easily understood by both? The possibility of family tensions and parental ambivalence about the upward mobility of children is certainly not confined to NESB mothers and their daughters. When children move beyond the educational level of their parents, this may well provide problems in any family and relate to sons as well as daughters. However, the potential may be greater in some cultures and greater with mothers and daughters given the often close nature of this relationship.
- More information is needed about the ways in which different cultural expectations about female roles interact with the education system in Australia; for example, do Vietnamese female students and Turkish female students react differently to our schools as a result of differences in female roles in these cultures, and if they do, what effect does this have on performance and post-school options?

- Are parents' aspirations for their daughters higher when there are no sons in the family than when there are sons?

Values concerning education

It is clear that while most parents valued educational success highly and saw it as important for their children's future, many were at odds with aspects of the school system. A detailed discussion of the very complex issues which this raises, given the Victorian government's policy of community participation in education as outlined in Ministerial Papers (Minister for Education, 1985), is beyond the scope of this study. However, the apparent disjunction between the views of many NESB parents and some aspects of current educational policy is relevant for children's retention at school and their post-school choices.

For example, we need to know how young people's views and commitment to school are affected by parents who have high educational aspirations for them but who at the same time are very critical of, or anxious about, schools. Are young people more or less likely to succeed because of this? Are they more likely to reject what the school has to offer? Are they more likely to be discouraged if they have difficulties at school? Does the dissonance affect family relations and through this, performance at school?

Although these are certainly issues for further research, the present study provides some relevant information. Firstly, many of the students we spoke with seemed able to hold together parents' views which were sometimes critical of aspects of schooling, and their own experience of school. That is, young people were able to identify the fact that their parents disagreed with aspects of schooling and to hold their own views which were somewhat critical but less so than their parents'. Students in fact did not admit to much conflict with parents about school, although there is other evidence to suggest that Greek adolescents do perceive themselves as in conflict with their parents over some aspects relating to school (Rosenthal, 1985).

Some students certainly felt 'on their own' when making crucial decisions about their future. If schools and other organisations and individuals who are involved in young people's transition from school are aware of this, they can take steps to ensure that young people have access to resources, information and support which they may not get at home.

There were indications in some families that the strength of parents' negative views of their children's school was influencing young people's attitudes. This was most apparent in several Turkish families in the study but the issue needs to be explored more fully across the board. There were a few students who were dissatisfied because they thought that their school would not provide them with the sort of education and/or training which they needed for the future. Some of these students also said that their parents had reservations about the school, but it was difficult to say whether student or parent was having the most influence on such thinking. Extreme discontent with aspects of schooling can finally lead to the child being taken out of the school and sent to another school. This is obviously not possible for some parents for practical and financial reasons.

The issue of 'discipline' and the desire of many NESB (and ESB) parents for schools to provide more of a 'moral' education, need to be explored more fully. The present study confirmed that there are a number of interrelated views underlying these concerns, for example respect for older people, respect for authority, the positive value of hard work and a belief that children need firm guidance in adolescence.

Many schools have already thought through some of these issues and school policies and practices will certainly explicitly or implicitly reflect a view on them. Where the issues are opened up for discussion with parents, there are opportunities to see what agreement (if any) there is between schools and parents, and what ideas might be amenable to change (both from the school's point of view and the parents'). For example, it may be that parents' need to have their children given firm guidance in adolescence and a school's emphasis on developing students' personal responsibility is not inconsistent, if the common aim of developing good work skills is emphasised.

Behind the issue of differing values of NESB parents and the schools their children attend, lie some fundamental questions which have not yet been resolved. For example, how does the leadership and professional role of the teacher fit in with respect for the rights of parents and their children? When there are basic differences between the views of parents and schools, how far should schools go in assuming that they know best for the child?

Despite these difficult questions, it is clear that schools can 'gain the confidence of parents by acknowledging their concerns' (The 'Age', 17/9/87:15). More generally, a recent MACMME project provided some useful models for facilitating NESB parent involvement in school decision making (Karas, 1985). The project relied on what should be regarded as essential resources in many schools if some of the issues mentioned in this report are to be taken up, that is, skilled and committed bi-lingual workers with knowledge of both the education system in Victoria and the cultural background of NESB families. Bilingual workers could greatly increase the level of communication between home and school, parents' understanding of the system, and hence parents' potential contribution to informed and appropriate decisions about children's schooling and future options. It is of the utmost importance that serious attention be given to the provision of such workers in the allocation of resources to education.

Home/school Interaction

Schools' and teachers' understanding of NESB parents aspirations and values, and NESB parents' understanding of the ways in which schools can or cannot help to fulfil these aspirations, are part of the overall need for more effective communication between home and school. This need has become very apparent in the wake of government policies which emphasise the rights of parents to participate in school decision making. The present study illustrated some of the misunderstandings which can occur and the effects which this can have on students' progress.

While some schools have made significant steps towards greater contact with the parents in their school community, the general picture remains fairly discouraging, despite the sincere and concerted efforts of staff in schools and consultants, project officers, and other people working at a state and regional level. Reasons for the difficulties of establishing on-going contact with parents, and in particular NESB parents, have been well canvassed and will not be reiterated in any detail here. On the parents' side, they include lack of time available to working parents, anxieties about approaching schools, and language difficulties; and on the school side inadequate understanding of parents' views, limited translation and interpreting resources and heavy demands on teachers' time. A recent booklet, 'Parents and Schools', lists a number of publications which explore these and other factors affecting parent participation in schools and how some schools have tackled parent participation (Ministry of Education, 1986).

Direct participation in decision making by large numbers of NESB (or ESB) parents is not likely to occur, given the barriers which exist to such participation. However, it is possible that the flow of information and the level of understanding between home and school could be increased. Significant change would require greatly increased resources, including ready access to translation and interpreting facilities and teams of bi-lingual workers. Arguments for such increased resources need to be continually put, but we also need to look at additional strategies for informing parents and increasing understanding between schools and home, given that expenditure of large amounts of money is unlikely in the near future.

The significance of interaction between home and school for the present study is that at a time of critical decision making for students and for families, the contact between home and school is generally limited. For a variety of reasons, there is more contact between home and school during the years of primary school, but when students enter secondary school, this is greatly reduced.

What then are the specific interactions between home and school which affect post-school outcomes for young NESB people?

Parent support

Assuming that both schools and parents want students to achieve, the high value which NESB parents usually place on education (and which is often accepted by NESB young people) is likely to be an important asset. How can schools enhance the general support and encouragement which a lot of NESB parents give their children?

- There were numerous instances in our study of parents who were anxious to help their children as much as they could but felt that they were not able to do so in the most effective way because they didn't really understand the system. It would appear that this is an area where schools could seriously consider the views of parents and explore ways in which parents may be able to give relevant support and assistance to their children. While the sort of assistance which some parents can give will be limited by their command of English, schools could encourage parents to contribute in other ways, for example in oral history projects. Schools which have focused on parents' experience and skills as part of the learning resources available for students generally find that understanding between home and school is increased and students ultimately benefit.
- Many students mentioned the importance of support and encouragement from their parents and it is recognised that such support can be crucial in the learning process. It is possible that schools could find opportunities to encourage parents to give such emotional support and to acknowledge the part which this plays in their children's learning.

Homework

Lack of homework or not enough homework was a consistent comment from parents from all NESB groups. This is an area where schools may feel that they can re-examine policies to see if there are ways in which parents' concerns can be considered and perhaps taken account of.

Homework was seen as important for a number of reasons. It is visible evidence of the fact that children are 'doing something' at school; to the extent that homework goes over material given in class and involves practicing further examples, it is seen as an essential part of the learning process and evidence that the teacher knows what he or she is doing; it can offer a chance for enrichment and additional learning material. The second and third of these factors were clearly a part of many parents' schooling and they were at a loss to see how learning could be effective without this sort of practice. In addition, homework can be a source of information for parents about what children are doing at school. Even parents whose English is limited can get some general idea of the range of subjects and topics which are covered at school. This is important when little is known of the system. All of the above comments would not necessarily require that homework be marked, since none relate directly to assessment.

The following checklist is aimed at raising some of the issues which schools could consider:

- Does the school have a policy on homework based on educational principles? Does it take account of any of the above issues mentioned by NESB parents?
- Were parents (including NESB parents) involved in any way in formulating the homework policy?
- Have efforts been made to explain the principles, as well as the policy itself, to parents? Does the policy include ways in which parents can be involved in children's homework?
- Has the homework policy been set out clearly for students?
- Are there consistent homework requirements across subjects and years? Where there are differences, have efforts been made to explain the reasons for these to both parents and students?

Assessment and reporting

The parents who participated in the present study wanted more detailed information about the progress of their children, in a form which they could understand and relate to and which would allow them to help their children make decisions about future directions. The thorough re-examination of assessment and reporting procedures which has been taking place in Victoria in recent years is a recognition that past procedures leave something to be desired. Ministerial Paper No. 6 (Minister for Education, 1985) and the Frameworks documents (Ministry of Education, 1987), while not setting out a definite policy, give schools some clear indications of ways to proceed. The Frameworks document suggests ways in which written communication to parents can clearly indicate what children are achieving and what efforts might be required in the future. However, it also argues that written reports should be only one way in which schools communicate with parents about their children's progress and that without other contacts, a written report will have limited meaning for parents.

In the light of policy directions in recent years, schools are beginning to re-examine their assessment and reporting procedures and a few schools are moving closer towards goal-based assessment and descriptive reporting (Participation and Equity Program Schools Resource Program, 1986 and 1987).

The extent to which parents' concerns accord with or are in opposition to developing policies needs to be explored. Evaluation of parents' reactions to changes in assessment and reporting has been built into planning in some schools.

In general, parents who participated in the present study wanted more detailed information about their children's progress. If efforts are made to involve NESB parents in changes in assessment and reporting, if they are kept informed and their concerns listened to, it is likely that NESB parents will appreciate the more detailed reporting which is being advocated. They are most likely to accept the changes if they understand the purpose and form of such reporting and if their concern for clear and helpful information about their children's progress is taken into account.

However, there are also likely to be points of opposition between schools and parents concerning reporting. In our study, there were some parents who wanted more precise information about children's capabilities, and clearer predictions about future performance. While it is true that more detailed reporting and better communication between home and school is likely to provide more precise information, there are limits to predicting future performance, particularly in the early years of high school. The use of letter grades is another potential point of conflict. Although this was not a major issue for the parents who participated in the discussions (it was referred to very infrequently), evidence from teachers suggests that some parents (ESB as well as NESB) feel more at home with letter grades and will in fact translate descriptive comments into letter grades.

On these, and other issues which are in clear opposition to current policy directions, attempts will need to be made to actively engage parents in discussion, and to explain the rationale behind policies. An understanding of the views and attitudes of parents is an essential first step towards resolving such differences. For example, if it is understood that many parents want more detailed information, this can be a starting point for explaining the rationale behind new reporting methods.

Those schools which have in recent years examined their assessment and reporting procedures in the course of reviewing curriculum structure and organisation, may well have considered some of the questions raised by parents during the discussions for this study. The following checklist of questions summarises the major concerns of parents. (It is highly likely that very few, if any, schools have the resources to answer all questions positively and thus provide what should be regarded as essential communication about student progress between school and home.)

- Are parents and students given information as clearly as possible and in the parent's own language if necessary?
- Are there opportunities provided for parents to discuss, ask questions and get clarification if they want to, again in their own language if necessary?
- Is the school's policy on assessment and reporting understood by parents and students?
- Is there regular communication between home and school aimed at co-operative attempts to overcome specific problems which students might have?
- Does the school provide information in a way which can help students and parents make decisions about the future?
- In assessing and reporting, is a balance maintained between not making

105

comments too harsh in order to encourage students and giving parents and students a false impression by failing to point out obvious difficulties?

The compulsory and post-compulsory years

Discussions with parents suggested quite strongly that many believe there is too great a difference between schooling in the compulsory years 7-10 and that in the post-compulsory years 11-12. They believe also that their children suffer because of lack of preparation for the later years. Students were concerned with the difference in the amount of work and effort which they felt they had to put in in years 7-10 and in years 11 and 12.

These beliefs and the factors which they are based on, need to be explored more fully. What exactly is it that leads parents to see junior school years as less demanding than later years? Is it merely a reflection of the homework issue? If schools increased the amount of homework they set in years 7-10 and showed that they were taking the issue of homework seriously, would this mean a change in the attitude of parents? Is the concern a reflection of the fact that years 11 and 12 are still dominated by the HSC (VCE) and much more resistant to change than the junior years?

On the other hand, it may be useful for schools to reflect on the rationale behind their junior school curriculum and organisation and whether more efforts could be made to explain it to parents. Discussions with parents suggested that the educational rationale for differences between the compulsory years and the post-compulsory were not well understood. Are years 7-10 too broadly based and not demanding enough of students? Are all students challenged sufficiently by the junior school program? Are there ways of making the change from years 7-10 to year 11 less abrupt for students and to better prepare them for the fact that more demands will be made on them in year 11?

The Need for Information

In order to maximise post-school options and outcomes, NESB parents and their children require information - about the education system and about further education and career options.

Our discussions indicated that some NESB parents lack quite basic information about the education system in general and the school which their children attend in particular. This was most apparent with Turkish and Vietnamese parents who had little formal education themselves. Although students of course have more direct access to some of this sort of information through attendance at school, it cannot be assumed that they understand the subtleties of a system which has evolved over decades.

In recent years, the education system has become much more flexible and some of the 'lock-step' features which existed before have disappeared. That is, it is no longer completely necessary to do everything in sequence. Greatly increased opportunities for further education allow people to 'catch up' what they might have missed out on at school. However, despite more flexibility, there still remain some sequenced activities which if missed can seriously disadvantage individuals. 'Catching up' later is a luxury many people cannot afford.

The most fundamentally important activity in this respect is acquisition of the English language. Students are severely disadvantaged in the general

process of learning and concept development if certain standards are not reached at certain points in the progression of schooling. However, in addition, language is also the most important key to information. Students who do not have good language skills can then be caught in the double disadvantage of not fully understanding the content of classes, and missing out on information which may help them make appropriate decisions.

When parents too have limited English skills, they are less likely to be able to provide the backup of general information provided by many ESB parents who are familiar with the school system. (This is not to deny the very real disadvantage of some ESB students whose families lack information and skills to negotiate the education system.) As indicated in the summary section, NESB parents who had a relatively high level of education themselves seemed to be more at ease with the system and could more readily get access to appropriate information, which was potentially helpful for their children. It is not so much a matter of knowing the details of the school system and how to become a doctor or a lawyer or whatever, but of understanding the general 'shape' of **any** education system and what sort of information to look for.

Two comments (one of which has been noted in the Turkish family section of this report, the other which was made by a Chinese-speaking parent) illustrate the point above. A female Turkish student who went to a school where there was not a large number of Turkish students said she did not realise, when she sat for her HSC, that she had to do anything more than pass to get into a tertiary institution. By implication, she did not know about 'Anderson scores'. The Chinese parent in commenting on the differences between colleges and universities said that Chinese parents knew that the status of university courses was higher because these courses required a higher entry score. In individual cases, such a difference in knowledge might not be crucial for success, and in fact, the Turkish student 'worked hard' and did well. However, general information and understanding of the sort which is illustrated by the Chinese parent's comment, does remove one potential barrier to success.

There are numerous points in the schooling process where informed choice is important for future options. Our discussions indicated that some Vietnamese families were confused about the choices which their children had to make in the middle years of high school. If the 'right' choice isn't made or at least the most appropriate choice, students can miss out on other opportunities. If parents don't know the implications of what their children are doing at school, or don't feel able to approach the school, they cannot help their children to make informed and appropriate decisions at the right time. Choice in the middle years of high school is also related to the overall aims of the years 7-10 program. Parents and students are likely to be able to make more appropriate choices if they understand the rationale of programs.

Most of the students who participated in the present study had had some contact with the careers teacher at their school. Careers teachers were seen as useful sources of information once a student had some idea of the areas in which he or she was interested. Careers teachers could potentially be very important sources of information for both parents and students, but they operate under considerable disadvantages. They generally have large numbers of students to deal with and hence are unlikely to have much time available to involve parents in discussions about their children's future. In addition, they have no specific training concerning ethnic family values and the possible influences of these values on students' decisions. Indeed, their initial training as careers teachers is limited and there have been cutbacks in funds available for the training of new careers teachers. The support which careers teachers receive depends very much on the attitude of individual principals and other staff members.

The successful transition of NESB students from school to post-school is dependent on an overall school program, and information about career planning and options is only one part of that program. However, the particular information to which careers teachers have fairly ready access is important. So too is the role which they could potentially play if they had available resources and skills to increase communication with NESB parents, as well as students.

Sources of information

In addition to schools, families sought information from friends and acquaintances, and (in some cases) welfare and community agencies. For more recently arrived families (Vietnamese and Chinese) and some Turkish families, informal networks within these communities were important sources of information. On the other hand, there were also suggestions from some of the participants in the study that such networks could easily establish and perpetuate misinformation.

Access of NESB families to information about the education system, further education and career options, is clearly not the business of schools alone. If access is to be improved, efforts will be required in a number of areas and at a number of levels.

- Major Ministry of Education policy statements, discussion papers and reports of school initiatives concerning the education of NESB students are now available in a variety of languages other than English. They are listed in the publication 'Parents and Schools' (Ministry of Education, 1986). The move to make this material available is to be commended. However, several comments need to be made.

  Firstly, as the report of this project points out, 'effective dissemination of information to parents is as essential as producing the information' (Nguyen, 1987). The language of reports is frequently not very accessible to the general reader, and translation may provide a further problem. Secondly, while written material is a valuable source of information for some people, there are many parents who do not feel comfortable with it.

  Making material available is only the first step. The project report includes details of one attempt to disseminate information. This was a workshop for representatives of community groups and parent organisations, which aimed to explore ways of increasing communication between ethnic parents and schools. One of the outcomes of the workshop was a statement stressing the importance of the role which ethnic organisations could play in both disseminating information and increasing the general level of communication between schools and NESB parents. The report also suggests that ethnic radio and newspapers could be used to disseminate information concerning schools and education.
- The above suggestions, made in the context of increasing NESB parent participation in schools, could also be used to disseminate information, and encourage discussion about schooling in relation to post-school options for young NESB people. In addition, our discussions suggested that places like community health centres, child-care centres, and language centres could be points of contact for NESB parents to obtain general information. Ethnic community leaders could also be kept informed in order that existing community networks have appropriate and accurate information. Workers in community centres are generally over-worked and stretched for resources and it is not suggested that they take on a heavy counselling or information role regarding education and post-school options in addition to what they already do. However, the fact that workers are in fact called on to advise with educational problems is perhaps an argument for them having greater resources, more information and some general staff development in the area.
- The extent to which NESB parents (particularly recently arrived parents) seek information about school and education through informal networks, (that is, by talking to friends and acquaintances) has been mentioned above. It is important therefore that accurate information be as widely available as possible. It is very possible that the Ministry could go some way

to improving the general level of knowledge and understanding by putting resources into developing connections with ethnic radio, newspapers and television. Programs would not need to use a great amount of resources to be potentially very effective. For example, radio interviews with teachers and consultants in various languages, periodic phone-ins where parents could ask particular questions, programs on particular issues such as choosing a career, interviews with students and staff from schools which have projects of interest to parents, could all be valuable sources of information for NESB parents.

- Educational bodies other than schools and the Ministry have an important part to play in NESB parents' access to information. For example, some parents who participated in the present study were anxious about the changes which were being made to the post-compulsory system of education in Victoria. While schools are probably the main source of information for parents concerning the new certificate (the VCE) and new procedures, the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Board (VCAB) could play an important part also. Some information is available in languages other than English, but if parents are to fully understand the changes and help their children to make appropriate decisions, VCAB may need to consider other forms of information and a variety of ways to making it available, for example, through specifically targetting ethnic organisations and newspapers as suggested above.
- TAFE colleges could also be a useful sources of information for NESB parents and students regarding post-school options. The autonomy of colleges means that there is considerable variation in the importance which each places on contact with the local community and on general issues of access. Extension of the moves which some colleges have made towards their local communities could open up a number of possibilities. For example, particularly where colleges have neighbourhood learning houses, consideration could be given to offering informal sessions for NESB parents and their children on information about TAFE courses, career planning and career options.
- If we take a wider perspective on some of the issues raised in this report, the importance of adult education becomes obvious. A broader, more flexible and much more accessible system of adult education provision could give NESB parents (and indeed all parents) access to a better general understanding of the education system, increase their confidence in dealing with schools and ensure that they have appropriate information to help children make the best decisions regarding their future.

To summarise, while schools will probably remain an important source of information for NESB families, other bodies and organisations could play a greater part than they do now in avoiding the situation where NESB students (and some ESB students) largely have to find their own way through the path from school to a variety of post-school options. There is potential for the level of available information to be greatly improved by the Ministry establishing more effective contact with ethnic media and organisations.

Conclusion

This study concerning some of the factors which influence decisions which NESB families make about their children's schooling and post-school options was exploratory. It aimed to raise issues rather than to come up with answers or solutions to many of the complex problems of providing for the successful transition of young NESB people from school to further education or work. Hopefully, it has highlighted the importance of seeing young people as a part of a family; a family which generally has both resources and difficulties as a result of re-settlement. The resources can include support, encouragement and the motivation of high parental aspirations for children's success; the difficulties can include lack of understanding, lack of information and barriers to communication. If schools and other bodies have a greater understanding of both the resources and the difficulties, then it is possible that more NESB young people will have a greater chance of a positive future outcome.

It should be emphasised that although this report was concerned with NESB families, many of the issues are relevant to the decisions which all families and young people make about future directions. In particular, the focus on increased communication between home and school and greater access to relevant information are general directions for development and would in fact benefit all young people.

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This report is based on discussions with parents and young people from a variety of non-English speaking backgrounds. The discussions indicated that while most parents had high aspirations for their children's future and placed a good deal of hope in education as a way of achieving success, they were concerned that schools were not always organised to help their children 'go further'. Parents also felt that because they did not have enough information about schools and career options, they were not able to help their children as much as they would have liked. The report looks at the implication of these views for schools and other community agencies.

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